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Pele in 1970
Michel Platini

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6 candidates to replace Mourinho at Chelsea

Beckham uncovered

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April 2007

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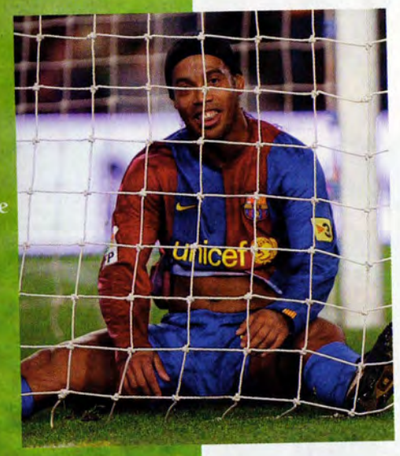

WELCOME TO the new-look *World Soccer*! We've added extra pages and introduced some new features but hopefully kept all the elements with which you have become familiar over the years.

You may have noticed a new strapline on the cover: One World, One Game. Our look may have changed, but our editorial values remain the same. As the UK's oldest and most respected football magazine, we will continue to do what we have always done: provide serious, unrivalled coverage of every aspect of the global game. From our cover star, Ronaldinho (page 36), to the Tibetan national side (page 101), we've got the whole world covered.

GAVIN HAMILTON, Editor
gavin_hamilton@ipcmedia.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Paddy Agnew makes a welcome return this month after a career-threatening injury. Paddy also works for *The Irish Times*, BBC, RAI and ESPN.

England-born Paul Gardner is the USA's leading soccer writer. Paul is also a columnist for *Soccer America* and *The New York Sun*.

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THE WORLD THIS MONTH

STARTER FOR TEN The questions the whole world of football is asking

1 HOW DID ENGLAND'S LEAGUE CUP FINAL DESCEND INTO CHAOS?

The Carling Cup Final became the Snarling Cup Final as Arsenal and Chelsea slugged it out at Cardiff. Final toll: three red cards – and a lot of explaining to do at Soho Square.

2 HOW DID THE AUSSIE A-LEAGUE BECOME SO POPULAR?

A record crowd of 55,436 watched Melbourne Victory thrash Adelaide United 6-0 in the Grand Final at the Telstra Dome. Watch out, Aussie Rules.

3 WHAT WERE LILLE THINKING ABOUT?

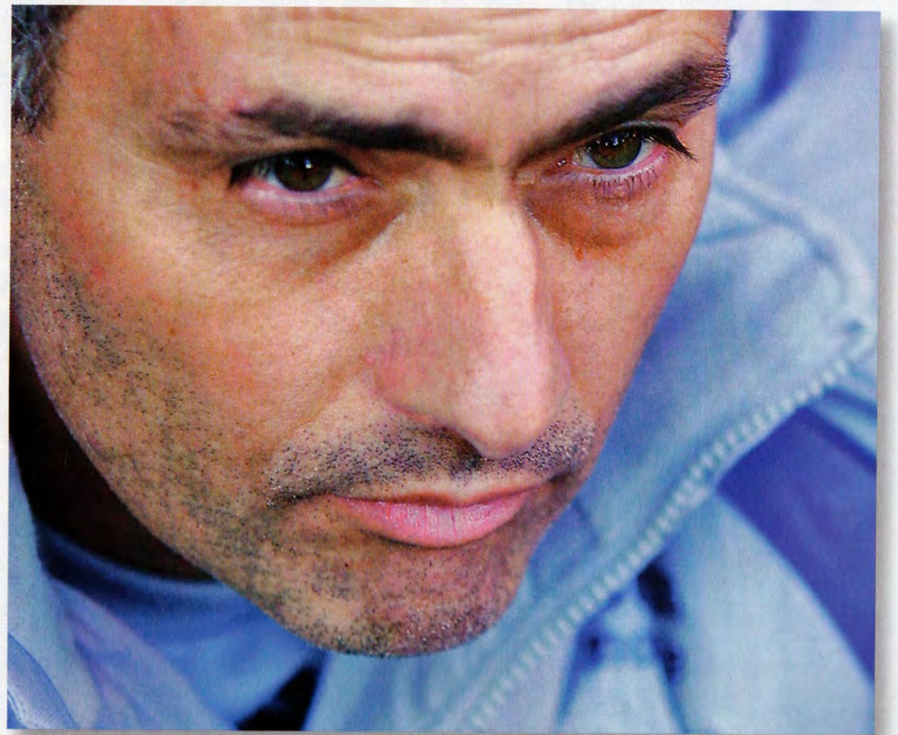
Claude Puel's side faced sanctions from UEFA after threatening to walk off the pitch in Lens in protest at Ryan Giggs' goal from a hastily-taken free-kick in the first leg of their Champions League first knockout round tie.

4 CAN SAMUEL ETO'O SAVE BARCELONA'S SEASON?

The Cameroon striker returned from a five-month injury lay-off to provide the Spanish and European champions with the cutting edge they have been lacking all season.

5 CAN ITALY TACKLE THE HOOLIGANS?

After the death of a police officer in rioting at the Catania-Palermo derby, the Italian authorities acted swiftly, closing stadiums, forcing matches to be played behind closed doors and introducing stricter security measures at grounds where fans were allowed to attend.



6 HOW LONG CAN JOSE MOURINHO LAST AT CHELSEA?

With his relationship with owner Roman Abramovich strained to breaking point, the Portuguese coach is living on borrowed time at Stamford Bridge.

7 HOW WILL INTER AND VALENCIA BE PUNISHED?

The clubs have been charged with improper conduct by UEFA after the incredible mass brawl at the end of their Champions League first knockout round game in Spain.

8 IS BETIS-SEVILLA THE MOST DANGEROUS DERBY IN FOOTBALL?

Serious questions were raised about the future of the tie after Sevilla coach Juande Ramos was knocked unconscious by a bottle thrown by a Betis fan during the Spanish Cup quarter-final second leg. Sevilla full-back Daniel Alves (pictured, grounded) and Sevilla president Jose Maria Del Nido were also hit by objects during the game.

9 WILL ANYBODY NOTICE MLS KICKING OFF WITHOUT BECKHAM?

The 12th season of Major League Soccer begins with a new team – Toronto FC – but not David Beckham, who will not arrive until July.

10 WHO THE HELL IS JACK KACHKAR?

The Canadian owner of pharmaceutical company Inyx is the latest businessman to want to own Marseille.

APRIL 2007 Vol 47 No 7

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The big issue

Should England, Italy and Spain lose their fourth Champions League spot?

YES says UEFA president Michel Platini

Platini...**"Why have four teams from England but none from Poland?"**

In UEFA, we have many different elements, big and small, rich and poor. There are big clubs, small clubs, the players, the media. Everybody is worried about what the future holds, and we have to work together to solve the problems.

I'm not a lawyer, I'm not a banker, I've not got much experience of administration, but I was a player and I know what the problems of football are.

The Champions League brings money into the game. More money brings more popularity but it also brings more problems, such as corruption and drugs. We have to defend the game against these things.

I'm not calling for a revolution. I don't want to change the format of the Champions League. It makes sense to have 32 teams, eight groups and then knockout rounds. Why change the formulae for a competition that is so popular?

What is not right, though, is the number of spaces per country. Four is too many for one country; we need to have three, maximum. Then you can allow in teams from countries such as Romania and the Czech Republic. Why have four teams from England but none from Poland? It's only a problem for the fourth in the league.

I don't want to go back to the old idea of the European Cup. That is finished. But it's a question of philosophy – my philosophy.

NO says Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger

Wenger...**"If you are not good enough, you are kicked out"**

Michel Platini was a great player who created excitement about football in France when my country won the 1984 European Championship. It's the first time we have seen a former player assuming such a high-profile position in UEFA and I hope it is a good thing.

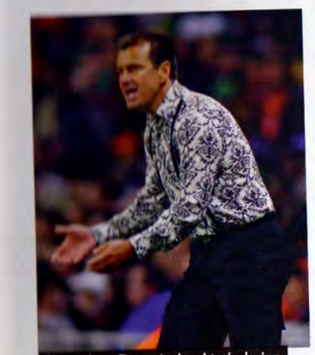
I'm scared Platini has promised some things in his bid to become UEFA president that he now cannot deliver. It is not up to the president to decide how many teams each country can enter in the Champions League because committees make these decisions, with representatives from all the top nations voting. Even in the top offices of football, we have a democracy, you know.

It may be Platini's proposal that only three teams from England or Spain should be allowed to enter, but I would be surprised to see this change come in.

Let's not forget that only two teams from the top leagues are allowed in as we stand. The two others enter a qualifying competition, and if other nations produce teams capable of beating the English or Spanish sides, then that country works with a reduced number for the season. If you are not good enough, you are kicked out, and that is a fair system.

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums
worldsoccer.com

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED THIS MONTH


Shirt tales...Dunga in daughter's design

● **Michel Platini** spent last September in Ireland learning English in preparation for the UEFA presidential election.

● **Ronaldo** is paying around £360 a night to rent a room in Milan's Westin Palace Hotel while he looks for somewhere more permanent to stay in the city.

● **Djair Siveiro da Cunha**, the father of Werder Bremen and Brazil midfielder Diego, was arrested for attempted murder after he ran over a motorcyclist who was allegedly having an affair with his wife.

● The garish shirts of Brazil coach **Dunga** are designed by his fashion student daughter.

● Superstitious Sevilla full-back **Daniel Alves** gets a new haircut for every big game, but with important matches coming thick and fast he has had to get his hair cut in stages. Hence the half-finished barnet on show against Barcelona.

● There's an unhealthy atmosphere at Werder Bremen. Midfielder **Torsten Frings** described some of his team-mates as "idiots", to which one of them, who remains anonymous, replied: "If that's what he thinks, he should get out."

● Munich journalist **Max Breitner**, the son of former West German international Paul Breitner, incurred the wrath of Bayern Munich last year when he ran an inaccurate story about their midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger. Breitner was banned from the club and sacked by his paper. Now, in a bizarre twist, he's just been hired by the Bayern press office.

● When Rangers flew to Israel to play Hapoel Tel Aviv in the UEFA Cup, their pilot was none other than **Bruce Dickinson**, the lead singer of heavy metal band Iron Maiden. Dickinson qualified as a pilot several years ago and works for charter airline Astraeus.

Flying Rangers...Dickinson (second right)

● **Paolo Maldini** and **Andrii Shevchenko** are back on good terms after apparently falling out when the latter quit Milan last year. Team-mate Kakha Kaladze recently organised a meal for the pair in a Milanese restaurant.

● Lyon's Brazilian midfielder **Juninho** was said to be inconsolable after hearing three French workers from the Rio de Janeiro-based charity he sponsors were killed by another employee, who had been accused of fraud by the trio.

● The French secret services have denied they have a file on would-be Marseille owner **Jack Kachkar**.

The Insider

CORRECTION
Last month's interview with Ruud Van Nistelrooy was by Gordon McKerrow.

FROM THE MESSAGE BOARDS

Posted by 'sam' March 7, 2007

"Not too surprised Barca went out [of the Champions League] – no side ever defends this title successfully and I started saying that as soon as they won it last season. But to see them go out as poorly and limply as that is disappointing. I'm realising that Henk Ten Cate's tactical role in last year's triumph was perhaps greater than Rijkaard's in terms of getting the most from the players. That 3-4-3 didn't look thought out at all. And why Rijkaard insists on 'testing' Eto'o on the left wing in must-win matches, I don't know. He's not a left winger, Dinho's not a centre-forward – let them both play where they're most comfortable!"

Post your comments at worldsoccer.com/forums
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CNN/WORLD SOCCER Club of the Month

1 Internazionale
2 Manchester United
3 Chelsea
4 Lyon
5 Sevilla
6 Celtic
7 PSV Eindhoven
8 Milan
9 Barcelona
10 Roma

On high...Inter

Inter top this month's poll after their record-breaking 17-match winning run in Serie A. More details every week on CNN's *World Sport* show.

SAVE MONEY ON WORLD SOCCER
SEE OUR SPECIAL SUBSCRIPTIONS OFFER ON PAGE 54

ESM Team of the Month

FEBRUARY

HOW IT WORKS

Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Magazine group vote for their first XI from Europe's top leagues. The players with most votes make the overall team of the month.

Timo Hildebrand
(Stuttgart; 2 votes)
Steady nerves and some fine saves have helped put Stuttgart among the front-runners in the Bundesliga.

Daniel Alves
(Sevilla; 3 votes)
The flying full-back has been in outstanding form for Spanish title challengers Sevilla, winning himself a place in Brazil's national side.

Maicon
(Internazionale; 6 votes)
Brilliant attacking right-back, very much in the tradition of the late Inter legend Giacinto Facchetti. On target in his side's Champions League draw at home to Valencia.

Nemanja Vidic
(Manchester Utd; 3 votes)
Made a slow start at Man Utd but is now irreplaceable, having proved himself virtually unbeatable on the ground and in the air.

John Arne Riise
(Liverpool; 4 votes)
Outstanding against Barcelona in the Champions League after his fall-out with Liverpool team-mate Craig Bellamy during a "team-bonding" session in Portugal.

David Silva
(Valencia; 3 votes)
Scored crucial goals against Barca and Inter (a spectacular volley) in the Champions League and has shown bags of vision and finesse on the left side of midfield.

Cristiano Ronaldo
(Manchester Utd; 8 votes)
Has produced scintillating wing-play and shown a new taste for finishing. Man Utd assistant boss Carlos Queiroz calls him "the Michael Jordan of European football".

Mark Van Bommel
(Bayern Munich; 3 votes)
As argumentative as ever, but without his goals, drive and leadership, Bayern would be in a sorry state. Holland coach Marco Van Basten should take note.

Didier Drogba
(Chelsea; 8 votes)
His two goals in Chelsea's League Cup Final win over Arsenal added weight to the assertion of team-mate Frank Lampard that he is "without question the best striker in the world".

Zlatan Ibrahimovic
(Internazionale; 3 votes)
Love him or loathe him, you can't ignore him. The Swede's form was instrumental in Inter's record-breaking winning run in Serie A.

Ryan Giggs
(Manchester Utd; 4 votes)
The 33-year-old is in the form of his life as Man Utd bid to take the Premier League crown back from Chelsea. Still a match-winner, as Lille discovered to their cost.

HOW THEY VOTED

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Maicon (Internazionale)
Vidic (Manchester Utd)
Ricardo Carvalho (Chelsea)
Cristiano Ronaldo (Manchester Utd)
Ronaldinho (Barcelona)
Silva (Valencia)
Giggs (Manchester Utd)
Drogba (Chelsea)
Ibrahimovic (Internazionale)
Villa (Valencia)

Don Balon (Spain)
Palop (Sevilla)
Daniel Alves (Sevilla)
Burdisso (Internazionale)
Agger (Liverpool)
Cristiano Ronaldo (Manchester Utd)
Van Bommel (Bayern Munich)
Iniesta (Barcelona)
Giggs (Manchester Utd)
Drogba (Chelsea)
Savidan (Valenciennes)
Gomez (Stuttgart)

Fanatik (Turkey)
Hildebrand (Stuttgart)
Ujfalusi (Fiorentina)
Materazzi (Internazionale)
Ayala (Valencia)
Riise (Liverpool)
Daniel Alves (Sevilla)
Cristiano Ronaldo (Manchester Utd)
Lovenkrands (Schalke)
Saenko (Nurnberg)
Drogba (Chelsea)
Totti (Roma)

Foot (Belgium)
Richert (Sochaux)
Daniel Alves (Sevilla)
Maicon (Internazionale)
Mertesacker (Werder Bremen)
Cristiano Ronaldo (Manchester Utd)
Gerrard (Liverpool)
Ambrosini (Milan)
Giggs (Manchester Utd)
Kuranyi (Schalke)
Keane (Tottenham)
Rocchi (Lazio)

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Carrick (Manchester Utd)
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Drogba (Chelsea)
Ibrahimovic (Internazionale)

Kicker (Germany)
Abbondanzieri (Getafe)
Maicon (Internazionale)
Alex (PSV)
Juan (Bayer Leverkusen)
Riise (Liverpool)
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Carriere (Lens)
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Ibrahimovic (Internazionale)

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Silva (Valencia)
Cristiano Ronaldo (Manchester Utd)
Kanoute (Sevilla)
Drogba (Chelsea)
Kiessling (Bayer Leverkusen)

NUMBERS GAME

Figuring out the footballing world

$130
the cost of a trial with Los Angeles Galaxy.

3,870m
the height at which Flamengo faced Real Potosi in Bolivia in the Libertadores Cup.

11
top-flight coaches sacked in Portugal this season after Rogerio Goncalves departed Sporting Braga.

£80m
Chelsea's losses in the last financial year.

15
different nationalities in the starting line-ups of PSV Eindhoven and Arsenal in the first leg of their Champions League tie.

63
days after the last weekend of the Argentinian opening championship before San Lorenzo and Racing Club got round to playing a match originally called off because of trouble among supporters.

6
penalties missed by Francesco Totti for Roma so far this season.

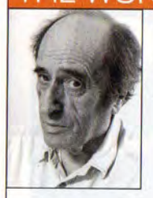
20
shots Atletico Madrid had on target in the 1-1 draw with Real Madrid, who had just six.

6
Chelsea games missed by owner Roman Abramovich after his alleged falling-out with manager Jose Mourinho.

£202m
Real Madrid's revenues in 2005-06, putting them top of Deloitte's "Money League" survey of the world's richest clubs.

5
the number of match officials – one referee, four assistants – that UEFA president Michel Platini would like to see introduced.

27
coaches sacked in 15 years by Cagliari president Massimo Cellino following the departure of Franco Colomba.



Brian Glanville

...on the FA's fatalist approach to England's big game in Israel...French police brutality...the League Cup's rise as the FA Cup slides...how Platini has got his numbers right...and Pardew's big win

IN AN IDEAL WORLD, Steve McClaren would never have been made England's manager at all; or at least would have been removed on the back of those dreadful performances at home to Macedonia and away to Croatia. As it is, the palsied FA, so shakily led by Brian Barwick, has approached the potentially decisive match against Israel in Tel Aviv with sheer fatalism. The word is, irrationally, that were England to lose, and with it the probability of qualification for the Euro 2008 finals, then McClaren and maybe even Barwick would at last be obliged to go. It is rather as though a ship headed for the rocks would keep a drunken helmsman at the wheel.

McClaren's daft idea that friendlies should give way to get-togethers wholly ignores the fact that when he has his team working together for matches, he seems incapable of giving them good advice or working out anything resembling effective tactics – i.e. that 3-5-2 in Zagreb!

There was word after David Beckham's bright and influential performance for Real Madrid against Bayern Munich that he might be recalled to the colours, which – unless he were moved to the left on his wrong foot – would mean the exclusion of the infinitely more dynamic Aaron Lennon, who should have been preferred to him during the World Cup. But the former captain's knee injury has now postponed the argument.

Israel are no super team, though they have hugely improved this season, have a solid core of English Premiership players, the wiles of the clever Yossi Benayoun and the highly precocious Ben Sahar. But under McClaren's regime, what confidence can there be that England can survive any away match?

One solution, which, of course, will not be adopted – Barwick has too much face (or what is left of it) to lose – could be to call in a temporary overseeing coach, relegating McClaren to a sinecure. I'd have Steve Coppell just as I – and hardly any others – would have welcomed him as the full England manager when the role became vacant and Barwick was blundering round Europe trying in vain to persuade Big Phil Scolari to take the job he swore he had never offered him!

Blundering on...but would defeat in Israel finally spell the end for McClaren?

THERE was not the ghost of an excuse for the threat of Lille's players, encouraged by coach Claude Puel, to leave the field after Ryan Giggs scored from a free-kick for Manchester United in the Champions League tie in Lens.

The goal, which the Lille players objected to because the referee had not whistled for the free-kick to be taken, put me in mind of the title of that popular book by Stephen Potter: *Gamesmanship: How to win without actually cheating*. Giggs did not cheat, though the goal, the only one of the game, gave United a meagre victory against modest opposition.

More to the point, far more significant and sinister, was the violent behaviour of the French police. Whatever the existence or otherwise of counterfeit tickets, whatever the horrors of the high metal fence – unpardonable all these years after the disaster of Hillsborough – the brutal baton and teargas attacks by the gendarmes on United fans, desperate only to escape being crushed, continued even after the game.

Strong arm of the law...riot police get heavy with Manchester United fans in Lens

But then, the French police have form. My mind goes back to the Parc des Princes and the European Cup Final between Bayern Munich and Leeds United. A platoon of French riot police wearing blue tracksuits were stationed at the Leeds supporters' end. When a solitary Leeds fan came over the barrier, they set about him in numbers, beat him up and dragged him away.

AS THE FA Cup and League Cup marched side by side through the mid-season, I was minded of the devastating last paragraph of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Looking hopelessly through the windows at an uproarious party, the poor animals can no longer tell the difference between the pigs and the farmers. So it now goes, alas, with these two competitions.

Of course, there should be clear bright water between them. The League Cup was conceived in spite by the late Alan Hardaker, secretary of the Football League, who did his malign best to stop any English club competing in the European Cup and must now be chuckling in his grave.

The League Cup began as a marginal affair, with the Final played over two legs, which limped along in obscurity till Hardaker, with two inspired strokes, gave it a one-off Final at Wembley and, against all logic and justice, purloined a place for the winner in the Fairs Cup and its successor, the UEFA Cup, instead of it going to a high-finisher in the championship.

The FA Cup, which began in 1872, is plainly the mother of all tournaments and has been shamefully betrayed by the spineless FA. In 1999-2000, it and the misguided government bullied holders Manchester United into renouncing the competition and competing in a farcical pseudo-world tournament in Brazil. Now the FA stands feebly by while club after club defy the perfectly plain rule that they should field their strongest sides in the tournament.

So it is that the League Cup has come up steadily on the rails, though it is still, as this season's Final showed, a total dog's dinner. Chelsea, using their full first team, won 2-1 having apparently been on a hiding to nothing against an Arsenal team, Cesc Fabregas and Kolo Toure apart, composed wholly of young reserves. Arsene Wenger had also used those reserves in all the earlier rounds.

But at no stage of the League Cup competition can one know for sure whether Premiership teams will field their full side or their reserves. So supposed giant-killers thrive, though seldom for very long.

Alas, the same thing is increasingly evident and has been for some years in the FA Cup. Weakened teams are put out by managers whose beady eyes are on other targets. When will the FA stand up and be counted?

ALL credit to Michel Platini, the new UEFA president. He was absolutely right, however quixotic, to demand that the number of competing teams in the Champions League from the major countries be cut from four to three. In a perfect world, we would turn the clock back to those more rational, less greedy times when each country had no more than one entrant, except in the case of the one whose team had just taken the title.

When the European Cup began I was disappointed that each tie had two legs, rather than sudden death, thus loading the dice in favour of the Goliaths against the Davids. Now, to even call it the Champions League is an infringement of the Trade Descriptions Act, it being as likely as not that the Final itself will be contested by two teams who are not domestic champions.

The Greed Is Good philosophy has, meanwhile, done for the once buoyant and attractive Cup-winners Cup, while the UEFA Cup is a shabby affair, allowing – illogically and indefensibly – teams that have been knocked out of the Champions League to try again.

ALAN PARDEW was quite right and proved it when Charlton thrashed an inept West Ham 4-0 at The Valley. He should never have been sacked by the Hammers' new chairman, Eggert Magnusson, who was maligning him almost up to kick-off. The Icelander has seen Pardew's replacement, Alan Curbishley, throw away his money and looks increasingly as if he is off to haunt a house.

There is a moral somewhere, but charity restrains me from drawing it. I hate to see either team go down, but West Ham are surely doomed. ●

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QUOTES & NOTES

Who said what and why

Harmony restored...Beckham and Capello

"The mark of an intelligent person is one who knows how to rectify his mistakes."
Fabio Capello justifies his U-turn on the selection of David Beckham.

"Probably half of America hasn't even heard of me."
Beckham reflects on the reception he might get when he moves to Los Angeles.

"This outbreak of violence has nothing to do with sport. I'm outraged and disheartened."
French federation chief Jean-Pierre Escalettes cannot hide his fury following a shooting incident during an amateur game in Paris in which two players and a coach were wounded.

"Can a team stay at the top of the European elite relying only on technique? A match is also a war."
Columnist Joan Golobart attributes Barcelona's home defeat by Liverpool to a lack of muscle.

"We made a mistake. On the pitch you see events in a different light compared to the TV screen."
Referee Arturo Dauden Ibanez apologises to Atletico Madrid after wrongly disallowing a goal by Luis Perea in the Madrid derby.

"Our system will be the most severe in Europe."
Christian Muller, head of finance at the Bundesliga, announces the introduction of a second audit per year for German clubs.

"Even if the coach lost every game, his job would be safe."
Palermo president Maurizio Zamparini gives the dreaded vote of confidence to Francesco Guidolin.

"If it helps us go to the next World Cup, so be it."
Peru coach Juvenal Silva welcomes the decision to play some qualifiers at high altitude in Cuzco.

"It will be a demonstration of how football should be."
Organiser Don Claudio Paganini believes fair play will be to the fore in the Clericus Cup, an international tournament for priests.

Symbol...Clericus Cup

"The law was respected if its spirit was not."
Former top French referee Joel Quiniou on Ryan Giggs' controversial winner, a free-kick goal, for Manchester United against Lille in the Champions League.

Sharp finish...Giggs hits the winner against Lille

THE WORLD IN NUMBERS

£10m

UNITED STATES

The combined value per year of new deals agreed by Major League Soccer with ABC/ESPN, Fox, HDnet and Hispanic channel Univision. ABC/ESPN and Univision, both with eight-year deals running until 2014, will contribute most of the funds (believed to be about £4.5m each) and will show 24 or 25 regular-season games, as well as national team games. The 2007 season will be the first in which TV companies have paid MLS for the right to screen games.

£2.33bn

ENGLAND

The value of the Premier League deal for seasons 2007-08, 2008-09 and 2009-10. Sky will contribute £1.31bn for the majority of the live UK rights, with Setanta paying £392m for a subsidiary live package. The foreign rights for the three seasons have been sold for £625m. The current three-year domestic deal with Sky, which ends this season, is worth £1.02bn.

£101m

SWEDEN

The amount paid by Swiss agency Kentaro for domestic football rights for five years. The controversial deal means broadcasters such as Viasat, Canal Plus, TV4 and SVT will now have to negotiate directly with Kentaro for the right to show league games as well as national team matches.

£300m

GERMANY

The amount received annually by Bundesliga clubs from ARD, ZDF, DSF (free TV), Arena (pay TV) and Deutsche Telekom (internet). The current deal, which runs from 2006 until 2009, is much larger than the 2003-06 agreement, worth £214m per year. The big winner in the current deal had apparently been Unity Media, the parent company of Arena, which saw off previous pay-TV rights holder Premiere. However, Arena lacked broadcasting experience, and with cable networks in only two of the country's 16 states, it was always going to struggle to live up to its promises. So it ceded its rights back to Premiere in return for 16 per cent of its rivals' shares.

£36m

BRAZIL

The amount paid by Globo TV for the rights to this year's Brazilian championship. It also paid £16m to screen the Paulista (Sao Paulo state) championship.

£730m

SPAIN

The amount paid by the Mediapro agency for the rights to show Real Madrid's league games over seven years. Mediapro is expected to sell on the rights to Sogecable, the company that has an existing individual deal with Madrid, worth £36m a year. Mediapro reached a similar agreement with Barcelona, paying some £670m for a seven-year deal, and then selling on the rights to Sogecable.

£1.26bn

FRANCE

The value of the three-year deal signed by pay-TV channel Canal Plus in 2005 to broadcast live top division games. The deal was the world's biggest until the most recent English agreement was sealed. Top division teams receive 80 per cent of the money, with the rest going to second division teams. The previous deal, under which rights were shared by Canal Plus and rival TPS, was worth £254m.

£20.8m

JAPAN

The annual TV rights revenue for the J.League in 2005. In 2006, J.League top division clubs were expecting to receive about £500,000 each from broadcasting rights.

£600m

ITALY

The annual value of TV rights in Serie A. Since 1999, clubs have negotiated individual deals with TV companies – Milan, Internazionale and (when in Serie A) Juventus command the highest fees. The rights are currently shared between Rupert Murdoch's Sky Italia, Silvio Berlusconi's Mediaset and Telecom Italia.

£20m

SOUTH AFRICA

The total revenue of the five-year deal between the Premier Soccer League and state broadcaster SABC, which sub-licenses midweek games to cable channel SuperSport. The current deal expires at the end of the season in May; the PSL is hoping to negotiate a new deal worth three times as much.

£48m

AUSTRALIA

The total value of a seven-year deal, which starts this year, between the Football Federation of Australia and Fox Sports. The deal gives Fox exclusive rights to all A-League and Asian Champions League matches, and Australia's Asian Cup fixtures and World Cup qualifiers.

Cause for concern...an unconscious Ramos is carried out of the Ruiz de Lopera stadium during the Seville derby

HEADLINERS

People in the news...on and off the pitch

Juande Ramos
Sevilla coach knocked out cold by bottle

SPAIN

THE REMAINING 34 minutes of the second leg of the Copa del Rey quarter-final between hosts Real Betis and city rivals Sevilla will be played behind closed doors at Getafe's Coliseo Alfonso Perez – more than 500 kilometres north of Seville.

That is the ruling of the Spanish federation's disciplinary committee after the game was abandoned with Sevilla leading 1-0 when a bottle thrown from the stands hit the head of their coach, Juande Ramos, knocking him unconscious and forcing him to spend the night in hospital.

Fortunately, Ramos came round but for a few minutes out on the turf at the Ruiz de Lopera stadium many feared the worst. Sevilla had just scored the first goal of the tie when Ramos was hit on the back of the head by a half-full bottle, staggered on to the pitch and collapsed in a heap, out cold. As he was carried off on a stretcher by medical staff, he remained absolutely motionless, his eyes vacant.

The headline in the country's best-selling newspaper, *Marca*, posed the question many were asking: "What if they had killed him?" It added: "We are risking a tragedy."

As *Marca* pointed out, missile-throwing in football is nothing new. Earlier in the derby, Sevilla full-back Daniel Alves had been struck by a bottle and the visitors' president, Jose Maria Del Nido, was hit by a coin.

On the same night, Barcelona goalkeeper Albert Jorquera was hit by a bottle thrown from the stands of Zaragoza's La Romareda stadium. Espanyol striker Raul Tamudo was recently hit by a bottle, Sevilla goalkeeper Andres Palop was struck by a full beer can at Atletico Madrid's Vicente Calderon stadium last season and a 2005-06 Copa del Rey tie between Valencia and Deportivo La Coruna was suspended after a linesman was hit by a coin. The incident at the Ruiz de Lopera became higher profile simply because the potential consequences of the missile-throwing were starker.

The fact that so powerful an image had gone round the world finally brought calls for tough action from the federation and heightened the determination to act against those who, at virtually every game in Spain, throw missiles at players, managers, referees and linesmen. Alas, that determination was not shared by Betis.

As well as ruling that the rest of the game would be played at Getafe, just south of Madrid, the federation also closed Betis's stadium for three games and opened an investigation into the behaviour of the Betis and Sevilla presidents, who were rightly accused of winding up the atmosphere in the days leading up to what is always a fiery match in any case.

But rather than accepting their punishment and taking any responsibility, Betis reacted like victims. After the match, president Jose Leon insisted that it was an isolated incident, despite the Daniel Alves and Del Nido episodes. Not only that, but the club also announced they intended to appeal, taking the matter to the civil courts if necessary.

Manolo Castano, Betis's legal spokesman, claimed the punishment was unfair given that other clubs have escaped without sanction for similar incidents – the prime example is Barcelona, who never fulfilled a two-game suspension for the infamous pig's head thrown at Luis Figo.

That in itself underlined the fact that Spain has a problem that will prove hard to eradicate, but more worrying still was Castano's claim the events of February 28 were, in fact, "not very serious".

Sid Lowe

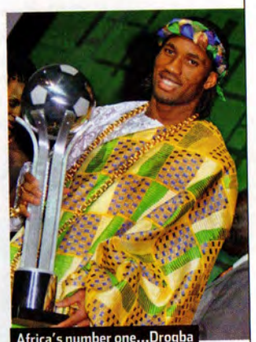
Didier Drogba
Chelsea striker on a high

ENGLAND

DIDIER DROGBA scored his 18th league goal of the season in Chelsea's 2-0 win at Portsmouth at the start of March to stay out front in the league scorers' chart.

It was his 29th goal in all competitions and wrapped up a perfect week. The previous weekend the Ivorian had scored both goals in the defeat of Arsenal in the League Cup Final in Cardiff, then, in midweek, pipped Barcelona's Samuel Eto'o to win the African Footballer of the Year award for the first time (see page 100).

The 28-year-old fully deserved the prize following his outstanding 2006. He captained his country to the African Nations Cup Final, in which they were beaten on penalties by hosts Egypt; then Ivory Coast made their first appearance at the World Cup. Drogba also won the English League for a second successive time.



Africa's number one...Drogba

The striker was undisputed man of the match in the League Cup Final, his goals capping an excellent all-round display that underlined the enormous progress he has made in England.

When Drogba arrived at Stamford Bridge from Marseille in 2004 he was renowned as a goal poacher. But now he is much more than that. He has been taught by manager Jose Mourinho about the need to track back, and his ability in the air has proved invaluable in helping clear the lines when defending set-pieces.

Chelsea's tactical shift this season, ostensibly to accommodate Michael Ballack in midfield and Andrii Shevchenko in attack, has suited Drogba perfectly, if surprisingly. Former Chelsea midfielder Nigel Spackman explains: "He is not a battering ram the whole time. He has been able to express himself more because he has a bit more energy to do it. Maybe Shevchenko's signing has taken pressure off him. Defenders might be taking more notice of Shevchenko's runs, and that has given Drogba more space and time."

Keir Radnedge

Anatoliy Tymoshchuk

RUSSIA

Zenit break Russian transfer record for Ukraine midfielder

Zenit St Petersburg have broken the Russian transfer market record by paying £10million to sign Shakhtar Donetsk and Ukraine midfielder Anatoliy Tymoshchuk.

Zenit are backed by energy company Gazprom, but reports in Ukraine that Shakhtar had accepted gas shipments in part-payment for the player have been denied. "There is no gas element in the deal nor was this possible," said Shakhtar director Serhiy Palkin. "We are a soccer club, not a gas broker."

Zenit also broke the record for deals between Russian clubs in December when paying Rubin Kazan £3.5m for Argentinian striker Alejandro Domingues.

Juan Roman Riquelme

ARGENTINA

Midfielder back at Boca

Former Argentina midfielder Juan Roman Riquelme has returned to former club Boca Juniors after falling out with Villarreal coach Manuel Pellegrini.

Boca signed Riquelme on loan for the rest of the season after the midfielder was dropped from Villarreal's starting line-up, with Pellegrini questioning his level of commitment.

Boca president Mauricio Macri welcomed his new signing, who will reportedly be paid £1million over the next six months, saying: "To find anyone better than him you have to go way back in the history of the club. Boca is his home."

True colours...Riquelme is in the Boca line-up again

Samuel Eto'o

SPAIN

Bust-up at Barca

Samuel Eto'o's return from a five-month knee injury lay-off was marred by a war of words with coach Frank Rijkaard after the Cameroon striker said he did not want to appear as a late substitute in a 2-0 league win over Racing Santander.

Eto'o claimed the Dutchman had implied that his refusal stemmed from a lack of commitment to the team, whereas the Cameroonian said he opted not to play only because he had not had enough time to warm up and feared that might cause another injury.

"Telling a news conference that I didn't want to play is the behaviour of a bad person," Eto'o said. "I have always thought about the group first. That is what hurt me most."

He also said that he was at the centre of a battle between two factions at the club. "At Barcelona, there are two groups, one of the president [Joan Laporta] and another of someone else [former vice-president Sandro Rosell, a close confidante of Ronaldinho], and they [the latter] are the ones unhappy now I have returned.

"This is not my war. It is between two other people, but I am being used. All I will say is that I will return to score goals."

Eto'o, who had returned to action the weekend before the Santander game, also as a substitute, against Osasuna, got back among the goals with the third in the 3-0 win over struggling Athletic Bilbao.

Row with Rijkaard...Eto'o

Sneijder to Barca?

Eyeing up Madrid?...Cristiano Ronaldo

RUMOURS

BARCELONA DAILY *El Mundo Deportivo* claims a representative of the Catalan club was recently in Amsterdam to discuss the possibility of signing Ajax midfielder WESLEY SNEIJDER, who would apparently cost about £8.5million.

Manchester United winger CRISTIANO RONALDO has instructed his agent, Jorge Mendes, to negotiate a summer transfer to Real Madrid, according to *AS*, which also speculated that KAKA could switch from Milan to Madrid, with ANTONIO CASSANO, MAHAMADOU DIARRA and ROBINHO moving in the opposite direction.

A high-ranking official at Real Madrid allegedly told German press agency DPA that his club would be selling Robinho at the end of the season. Real would let the Brazilian forward go for around £13m, some £9m less than they paid Santos for him 18 months ago.

Marca says Real Madrid are at the head of a queue of big clubs hoping to prise France star FRANCK RIBERY away from Marseille. Italy's *Corriere dello Sport* revealed that Juventus are ready to table an £11m offer for the attacking midfielder and that Juve coach Didier Deschamps had already talked with the Marseille management.

With Bayern Munich ready to tear up their low-key transfer policy in a bid to return to the top table, *Kicker* reported that their top target is Chelsea winger ARJEN ROBBEN, who is increasingly frustrated with his role as supersub at Stamford Bridge.

Corriere dello Sport has Werder Bremen striker MIROSLAV KLOSE and playmaker DIEGO moving to Juventus in an £18m deal next summer. Apparently, Bremen would receive attackers Valeri Bojinov and Marcelo Zalayeta in part-exchange.

La Stampa is running with a big-name swap story involving Juventus keeper GIANLUIGI BUFFON and Milan striker ALBERTO GILARDINO.

Fiorentina will make a £16.5m raid for FC Porto's Brazilian centre-back PEPE and winger RICARDO QUARESMA according to *La Nazione*.

Juve targets...Diego (top) and Klose

"*Marca* says Real Madrid are at the head of a queue of big clubs hoping to prise France star Franck Ribery away from Marseille"

MOVERS & SHAKERS

Home ground...Taylor carries a symbolic ticket for this year's UEFA Cup Final at Hampden Park

Taylor takes new UEFA role

● **DAVID TAYLOR**, the Scottish FA's chief executive, is to fill the new UEFA position of general secretary. Previously, the European body has had a chief executive, the last being Lars-Christer Olsson, who was dismissed within days of the defeat of fellow Swede Lennart Johansson by Michel Platini in the presidential election. The shift in job title signifies the fact that Taylor will concentrate more on administration than policy.

● German federation president **THEO ZWANZIGER** will take much of the credit for the fact that his country made a bigger World Cup profit than expected. Although he was joint president with Gerhard Mayer-Vorfelder until after the finals, when he assumed sole control, he had, in effect, been running the show for more than a year. Total revenue from the tournament was £371m and expenditure £268m, leaving an after-tax surplus of £70m.

Under fire...Antonio Matarrese

● **ISSA HAYATOU** wants to extend his reign as president of the African confederation when his current term expires in 2009. Naturally, the Cameroonian, who has already been at the helm for 20 years, wants to be in place when the World Cup comes to Africa for the first time in 2010.

● **ANTONIO MATARRESE**, not long back in power in Italian football as president of the League, should quit already according to Maurizio Zamparini, president of Palermo. Zamparini says: "For one thing, his comments after the hooligan trouble [in Catania] were of no help to anyone. Secondly, and more important, he missed a government 'round table' to talk through the issues. The clubs must be represented otherwise politicians and lawyers will have a field day."

● Somali federation president **MUHYIDIN HASSAN ALI** is under investigation by FIFA for allegedly siphoning off thousands of dollars from the FA account. General secretary Abdiqani Said said: "Ali has been suspended because he mismanaged $101,076 [£52,360] meant to pay salary arrears for three years and telephone bills. He had replaced me as a signatory without the knowledge of the executive."

Keir Radnedge

Gianluca Pessotto

ITALY

Denies fall was suicide attempt

Former Juventus defender Gianluca Pessotto has denied that his fall from the top floor of the club's Turin headquarters last June was a suicide attempt.

Pessotto, appointed Juve's general manager the previous month, suffered multiple fractures and internal bleeding after falling 15 metres from a window. His wife Reana said he had been suffering from depression.

"I believe the fall was an accident," Pessotto said in a TV interview. "But we should not be afraid to speak out and express clearly whatever it is that we feel. If someone is sad, it is right that he says so. If someone is depressed, it is right that he says so."

Pessotto admitted that making the transition from player to official had been tough. "When you stop playing you realise what you had, but it is hard to find a way forward and start a new life," he said.

MLS move...Galindo

Maykel Galindo

UNITED STATES

Cuban defector joins MLS

Former Cuba striker Maykel Galindo, who defected when playing for his country in Seattle in July 2005, has signed for Major League Soccer club Chivas USA.

Galindo, 26, was granted political asylum by the American authorities after Cuba's 3-1 defeat by Costa Rica in a CONCACAF Gold Cup group match. He has since been playing for Seattle Sounders in the United Soccer Leagues.

BLATTERWATCH

FOR THE FIRST time, FIFA president Sepp Blatter has disclosed his annual income, telling Swiss newspaper *Sonntags Zeitung*: "I do not get a salary but get compensation. I am a pensioner. I am paid $1million [£518,000]. That is appropriate for an executive president."

In the same interview, Blatter said the issue of money distribution within the game had to be addressed, saying: "A gulf is opening up. The rich are getting even richer."

At a media briefing in London, Blatter said that he favoured continued rotation of the World Cup, with the 2018 finals going to North America. He added: "It is not definite the finals will come back to Europe in 2018."

But a few hours later at a private function, he took a rather different line, saying: "We will have to wait and see at the FIFA executive committee in December as to how the rotation system for the World Cup will operate when it comes to the 2018 event. Nothing is off the table, and that includes England being the host nation."

Meanwhile, Blatter angered Colombia by claiming that their bid to host the 2014 finals was "more for PR reasons, to promote the country". State president Alvaro Uribe hit back, saying acidly: "Before he can say that, he has to get rid of all the mafia who have infected football, and respect Colombia."

Talking money and trophies...Blatter

GOOD MONTH FOR...

returned to his native Italy, with Parma, after an absence of almost 10 years. He replaces Stefano Pioli, who was sacked after defeat at Roma left them second bottom in Serie A.

Claudio Ranieri

The former Chelsea, Valencia and Atletico Madrid coach has

Back in the fold...Veron

Juan Sebastian Veron

The Estudiantes midfielder, who has not played for Argentina since November 2003, was included in a squad of home-based players by national coach Alfio Basile.

Javier Mascherano

The Argentinian midfielder was cleared by FIFA to join Liverpool from West Ham, despite the confusion surrounding his relationship with the Media Sports Investments company.

BAD MONTH FOR...

Francesco Flachi

The Sampdoria striker faces a two-year ban after testing positive for cocaine following a game against Internazionale in January.

Johann Vogel

The Swiss captain was dropped from the squad for friendlies against Jamaica and Colombia, coach Kobi Kuhn saying it was "because the chemistry was no longer right, on the pitch or off it". He added that it was unlikely Vogel would play again for the Euro 2008 co-hosts.

Dropped...Vogel

Rodrigo Martins Cintra

The Brazilian referee was suspended indefinitely for sending off the wrong player in a Paulista (Sao Paulo state) championship game between Corinthians and Rio Branco.

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Hear the silence...Catania take on Internazionale behind closed doors in the Stadio Angelo Massimino as punishment for the rioting at the derby with Palermo

Empty promise?

A month after the death of a policeman in the Catania riot, only four Serie A stadiums remained closed and there were doubts about whether the authorities would take a tougher line with hooligans

PADDY AGNEW
in Rome

ON JANUARY 27, Cancellese were at home to Sammartinese in a hotly contested Terza Categoria derby in Luzzi, Calabria, southern Italy. Sam who? Terza what? Who has ever heard of Luzzi anyway?

For the record, the Terza Categoria is an amateur league at the 10th level of the Italian game, and Sammartinese won 2-1. But not everyone in the 57-strong crowd was happy with the result. With both sets of players still arguing among themselves as they left the pitch, some of the "fans" got involved in the argument. Soon a bout of fisticuffs, and worse, had started.

It was at this point that 41-year-old Ermanno Licursi, a Sammartinese official, decided to intervene to try to calm things down. For his pains, Licursi also became involved in the fracas, being knocked to the ground and kicked so hard in the head that he was killed, almost immediately, right there on the pitch.

The incident was reported in the national press, yet it assumed a relatively minor profile until six days later when police inspector Filippo Raciti was killed during a riot outside the Serie A Sicilian derby between Catania and Palermo.

Before the game kicked off, a minute's silence was held to honour the memory of Licursi. Unfortunately, various "fans" at the Angelo Massimino stadium interrupted it by whistling and chanting insults at their rivals. At that very moment, other so-called fans were busy outside the stadium whipping up the riot in which Raciti died.

Where does Italian football go from here? Well, a lot could depend on UEFA's decision about hosting rights for the 2012 European Championship, which will be announced on April 18. Before the Catania incident, Italy seemed odds-on to stage the tournament ahead of the rival bids of Ukraine/Poland and Croatia/Hungary.

Changing direction

If Italy does win the rights, state funds will be made available to clubs at low interest rates, enabling them to both buy and modernise their stadiums. This could be the first, vital step in changing the direction of Italian football.

Ironically, in the year when the intrinsic qualities of calcio were shown as Italy won a fourth World Cup, the *Calciopoli* match-fixing scandal and the recent killings underlined its burgeoning off-field problems.

Football violence is not a football-only matter, but an expression of the society in which it takes place. In the case of Italy, it is a reflection of the stresses and strains experienced by a society plunged into political, economic and cultural self-doubt. Who can really be surprised to find that elements among young people in Catania, a mafia-exploited city, were all too willing to violently express their sense of alienation and frustration? Significantly, for the hooligans of Catania, it was the police, and not the Palermo fans, who represented Enemy No 1.

All of which prompts doubts about the long-term benefits that might emerge from the nationwide sense of disgust and distress at the Catania riot. Will the football authorities really take a hard line this time? Will police authorities be allowed to take a hard line? Two seasons ago, alarm bells rang when three top-level games in Italy had to be abandoned because of crowd violence –

> "For the hooligans of Catania, it was the police, and not the Palermo fans, who were Enemy No 1"

Who's a waste of money?...Ronaldo celebrates after scoring on his full debut for Milan against Siena

Those who said Ronaldo would not be worth the £5million reportedly paid by Milan to Real Madrid for his services were perhaps having second thoughts after he scored twice in a 4-3 win away to Siena in his first full game.

In the space of one afternoon, the 30-year-old Brazilian had gone from "unmotivated crock" to "phenomenon" again. As Milan headed off to Glasgow the next day for their Champions League tie with Celtic, vice-president Adriano Galliani was assuring the media that they were not "Ronaldo-dependent" and that even without the cup-tied striker, they would still do well. They drew 0-0.

"Deaths linked to football are a part of this great movement that the police authorities still haven't managed to bring under control"

League president Antonio Matarrese

Roma v Kyiv Dynamo and Internazionale v Milan in the Champions League, and the Roma v Lazio league derby.

In the wake of those and other incidents, then interior minister Giuseppe Pisanu introduced tough legislation that forced local authorities and clubs to modernise their crowd-control facilities at grounds. Yet, by the time of Raciti's death, only four top-division stadiums – the Olimpico in Turin, the Olimpico in Rome, the Franchi in Siena and the Favorita in Palermo – actually complied with the requirements of the legislation. All the other Serie A grounds had been operating on a system of temporary licences or waivers signed virtually on a week-by-week basis.

Are we now heading for more of the same? Just two days after the death of Raciti, Football League president Antonio Matarrese sounded a staggeringly cynical note when, in a much-criticised radio interview, he said: "Unfortunately, deaths linked to football are a part of this great movement that the police authorities still haven't managed to bring under control."

In other words, the show must go on. A small minority of "fans", maybe 100, at the Roma-Parma game the next weekend did even worse when they turned their backs and whistled during a minute's silence in honour of Raciti and Licursi. However, the majority of Roma fans saved the day by drowning out the whistles with vigorous applause.

At the time of writing, parliament was debating whether to ratify the decree introduced by Giuliano Amato, Pisanu's successor as interior minister, five days after the Catania riot (a ministerial decree must be ratified by parliament within 60 days of being issued). The decree not only reinforces most of the measures introduced by Pisanu (such as electronic turnstiles and named tickets) but it also would introduce new, tough measures, including a ban on block sales of tickets to away fans; the use of club stewards inside grounds; tougher punishments for fans guilty of violent behaviour inside or outside grounds; and close monitoring of the often cosy relationship between clubs and their "Ultra" fans, many of whom have been able to benefit financially in recent years, chiefly through the threat of violence.

Yet federation commissioner Luca Pancalli expressed his fears that parliament might soften the measures in the decree when it came before them, saying: "I am quietly worried about just how and in what form the anti-violence [Amato] decree gets made into law."

In the immediate wake of the Raciti killing a majority of games in Serie A and Serie B were played behind closed doors, on the orders of the Osservatorio del Viminale (a sort of football intelligence unit set up by the ministry of the interior, comprising representatives of the police, football federation and League, referees, fire fighters and local government). Within a month of the Catania riot, however, only four stadiums – those of Napoli, Brescia Piacenza and Catania – remained closed to the public. All the others were either entirely open or open to season-ticket holders.

Neutral venue

Catania is destined to remain closed until the end of the season, with the club forced to play "home" games behind closed doors at a neutral venue. Catania have appealed, so far in vain, saying that the loss of revenue will ruin them.

On the field, Internazionale's record-breaking winning run in the League was brought to an end by Udinese, who held them to a 1-1 draw. The 17-game sequence had begun after another draw with Udinese (0-0) on October 22. Inter still held a 14-point lead over closest challengers Roma.

Coaches Alberto Zaccheroni (Torino) and Franco Colombo (Cagliari) were sacked in late February, and, curiously, both were replaced by the man they themselves had succeeded. Gianni De Biasi, ousted by Torino even before the season began, returned after the team lost their sixth consecutive game. Marco Giampaolo, sacked by Cagliari only in December, was recalled after the team were beaten 2-0 at home by Lazio. Colombo is the 27th sacking by owner Massimo Cellino in 15 years. ●

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Crowded house

The record attendance at the league Final suggests Aussies are learning to love the game

JIM HOLDEN
in Melbourne

ARCHIE THOMPSON has an achievement in soccer's record books that may never be surpassed – his 13-goal haul for Australia in their 31-0 defeat of American Samoa in a qualifier for the 2002 World Cup. But that is now an irrelevance to the feisty striker after he scored five goals in the Grand Final of the A-League as Melbourne Victory handed a 6-0 thrashing to bitter rivals Adelaide United.

That tally for Australia was almost an embarrassment, the goals garnered in a match that should never have been played. In contrast, his Grand Final haul came in the concluding match of the year that Australian soccer truly came of age, on a night when the sport confirmed it is a serious rival to Aussie Rules, the country's traditional and native football game.

Thompson, who had predicted he would score a hat-trick against Adelaide, highlighted the most significant statistic of the occasion, saying: "There were more than 55,000 here, and you don't often get that, even in Europe."

The Grand Final was played at the modern Telstra Dome stadium in Melbourne, in front of 55,436, to be exact. Not only was that the largest soccer crowd for an Australian club match, but it was also a larger attendance than for any Aussie Rules match at that ground.

While Melbourne celebrated their win, which was thoroughly deserved after dominating the whole season, Adelaide were left fuming by the sending-off of skipper Ross Aloisi, who collected two soft bookings in the opening half-hour. Adelaide contrasted the expulsion with the leniency shown to Melbourne's veteran hard-man skipper Kevin Muscat, whose crunching tackle in the second minute put Adelaide playmaker Diego out of the game.

Adelaide coach John Kosmina gave a Star Wars verdict, saying: "This was one of those games where the dark forces of the universe had etched that result in concrete before the first whistle had gone. I am a bit of a fatalist at times; it's just how it panned out."

Kosmina lost his job in the wake of defeat, just as former England star Terry Butcher had when he failed to inspire defending champions Sydney FC to reach the Grand Final. The pressure for success is huge in Australian sport, and nobody should now doubt that soccer has become one of the heavyweight sports of the nation.

Long gone are the days when people who liked soccer were derided by the Aussie mainstream as "Sheilas, Wogs and Poofters", the famous title of the autobiography of Johnny Warren, Australia's captain in the 1970s. Today, after the national team's excellent showing at the World Cup in Germany, it is the most fashionable sport in the land.

Soccer now has 351,000 participants among youngsters, making it second only to swimming. Among boys it is the most popular sport, with 268,500 taking part compared to 188,500 for Aussie Rules.

Chris McDermott, an Aussie Rules legend, acknowledged the import of such figures when saying: "The powerbrokers of our game may deny it, but at grassroots level Australian Rules is under siege. Kids in their droves are turning away from our traditional code and flocking to the new kid on the block. Soccer is flying in many ways. On the field it has never been more spectacular and on TV the coverage has never been better. The face of sport in Australia is changing, and my game has to beware."

Such words would have been unthinkable even five years ago. Soccer was in deep crisis, with no TV deals, no sponsorship and almost no credibility. The change began with the intervention of billionaire property dealer Frank Lowy, the second richest man in the country. He brought in new leaders to the reconstituted Football Federation of Australia, in particular luring chief administrator John O'Neill from rugby league.

Master stroke

The first master stroke was to create new teams with no sectarian or ethnic connections, as they had had in the past. Each major city would have its own single, identifiable club to win supporters from every district and background. And that is exactly what they have done. The Grand Final crowd was no fluke – matches right through the regular season attracted gates of up to 40,000, the figures boosted by superb marketing and the World Cup effect.

Long before the Grand Final, the *Melbourne Age* summed up the new status of soccer with the headline: "The Hottest Ticket in Town." And that was when Australia were playing England at cricket in Melbourne and the Australian Open tennis tournament was in its first week in the city.

That said, the standard of the A-League is still only average. The best Australian players are all based abroad and the quality of the imports is low, with one or two exceptions. Adelaide, for example, brought in veteran Brazilian striker Romario, who was hoping for easy pickings as he aims for 1,000 career goals. Perhaps it was a good sign that he failed during his four-game stint. The best of the imports was another Brazilian, journeyman striker Fred, who played a vital role in Melbourne's success.

If the A-League is to capitalise on its surge, it will have to attract bigger and better names. But with regular crowds of 30,000 there should be the cash to drive the sport forward and perhaps encourage the best Aussie players to remain at home. The League is also likely to benefit now that the Socceroos and club sides play in Asian competition rather than the nether world of Oceania, where more futile games of the type against American Samoa would have awaited.

Down the line, too, Australia could also host the World Cup. The stadiums, the hotel and transport infrastructure are all in place, and now there is a seemingly unquenchable enthusiasm for the event. The Aussies will be credible rivals to England should they bid for the 2018 tournament and might also be emergency alternatives should South Africa 2010 or South America 2014 come to grief.

Australia knows how to stage major sporting events, as the 2000 Olympics in Sydney proved so spectacularly. Now the country has proved it truly knows how to love soccer. ●

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Net loss...Adelaide's Michael Valkanis is left floundering as Archie Thompson (not in picture) scores one of his five goals in the A-League Grand Final

Altitude sickness

Flamengo were furious after being forced to play a Libertadores Cup tie at almost 4,000 metres – but the heat of Rio can be just as inconducive to playing football

BRIAN HOMEWOOD in Rio de Janeiro

WITH ITS twisting, cobbled streets and centuries-old colonial houses, Potosi is a delightful old city situated at a dizzying 4,070 metres above sea level in the Bolivian Andes. It was once the largest city in the Americas having grown rich on silver mining, and today lives off tourism and the mining of zinc, lead and tin from the nearby Cerro Rico (Rich Mountain).

However, Brazil's Flamengo were less than impressed when they visited for a Libertadores Cup match against Real Potosi. Despite coming from 2-0 down to force a 2-2 draw, the Rio club were furious at having to play at such altitude and issued a sulky statement the next day. It ran: "Last night, Flamengo pulled off a heroic draw against Real Potosi in unsporting and inhumane conditions. We will not take part in [any more] matches at an altitude above the limits recommended by sports medicine.

"A football pitch at an altitude not recommended by health specialists does not offer equal conditions to both teams and this damages the sporting principle of fair play. It degrades the human condition and puts the life of the athletes at risk. Failure to ban games in these conditions is the same as being connivant with doping."

Although Potosi's Mario Mercado stadium is about 200m below the city centre, it is almost certainly the world's highest first division venue (Peru's Union Minas, who play at 4,300m in Cerro do Pasco, were relegated several years ago). It also staged Libertadores Cup ties four years ago on the only other occasion Potosi qualified for the tournament.

The subject of altitude, along with the alleged benefits it brings to the home side, is a thorny one in South America.

After reaching the last 16 of last year's World Cup, Ecuador believed they had answered the doubters who suggested they had qualified for the finals at all only thanks to playing their home matches at 2,800m in the capital Quito, where they are unbeaten in nearly six years.

Clubs from the Andean countries of Chile, Peru, Colombia, Bolivia and Ecuador are adamant they are merely exercising their right to play matches in their own cities. The same goes for the national teams of Bolivia and Ecuador when they play World Cup qualifiers in their respective capitals (La Paz is even higher than Quito at 3,600m).

It is generally accepted that 21 days are needed to fully adapt to altitudes of 3,000m and above. As this is not feasible with modern football's calendar, most teams try to arrive just two hours before kick-off so they play the game before the effects of altitude sickness kick in.

In 1997, Argentina coach Daniel Passarella caused outrage in Bolivia when he described conditions as inhumane before a World Cup qualifier in La Paz. The match went ahead in a highly-charged atmosphere, two Argentinians were sent off, their goalkeeper, Ignacio Gonzalez, butted an opponent in an incident missed by match officials, and a brawl held up play for 10 minutes in the second half. Bolivia won 2-1.

That was Argentina's last defeat in La Paz. They scored twice in the last three minutes to draw 3-3 in 2001, and won 2-1 two years ago when coach Jose Pekerman opted to take a second-string side up the mountain. "This is football – you can have difficulties such as heat, cold, snow, rain, wind, a bad pitch or high altitude, but the most important thing is to play better than the opposition," Pekerman said, reacting rather more elegantly than Flamengo. "You must not forget the most important thing – the football."

In fact, it is clear than altitude on its own will not win games, nor is there any evidence that it is life-threatening.

Bolivia won only three of their nine home 2006 World Cup qualifiers. But instead of introducing a new youth policy and ensuring a better-organised domestic game to improve the national side, they have merely contemplated staging their World Cup games in Potosi instead of La Paz.

Peru, who last qualified for a World Cup in 1982, may also play the altitude card by moving their home games from low-lying capital Lima to the historic Andean city of Cuzco at 3,500m. "I've watched for 20 years as teams have come and walked over us in Lima," said federation director Juvenal Silva.

Short shrift

As for Flamengo, their complaint got short shrift from the South American confederation and brought a quick response from Real Potosi. "We don't ask to play in the heat," said club director Angelo Porcel. "It's inhospitable because of the mosquitoes and the humidity. Of course a change of climate will affect you. But you can't say whether it's more complicated to go up or down a mountain."

Many scientists, too, feel that playing in extreme heat is, in fact, far more dangerous and difficult than high altitude.

Marcelo Damato, a columnist in the Brazilian sports paper *Lance*, wrote: "The Red-and-Black [Flamengo's colours] whingeing about the altitude of Potosi was lamentable – a mixture of hysteria, xenophobia and opportunism. Hysteria because since Brazil lost in La Paz in the World Cup qualifiers for 1994, playing there has gone from being complicated to inhumane. Xenophobic because in Brazil, the foreigners are always sneaky (or suckers). Either, it's a plot by FIFA to stop us winning a sixth World Cup, or the Spanish-speaking players and referees conniving against us in the Libertadores, or Bolivians wanting to asphyxiate us. We accuse others of bad faith because we have it ourselves.

"Of course it's difficult to play at 3,000m, just as it is to play at -10°C in Russia or at 36°C in Rio de Janeiro."

Three days after playing Potosi, Flamengo travelled to Madureira for an afternoon Carioca (Rio state) championship match played in a temperature of over 32°C. Conditions were truly absurd for football, yet this was conveniently ignored by both Flamengo and Globo television, who favour showing games in an afternoon slot and whose commentators happily joined in the bad-mouthing of Potosi. ●

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Taking the air...Flamengo players are given special sessions to allow them to acclimatise to conditions in Potosi

Family affair

Jose Mourinho is just one of four figures at Chelsea aspiring to be Roman Abramovich's favourite son

GABRIELE MARCOTTI
in London

THE WONDERFUL thing about events at Chelsea over the past 12 months has been how beautifully they have reflected the archetypes of the human condition.

Start with Roman Abramovich. What does the man who has everything buy himself? If you have accumulated £10billion, what do you do next? (To put that figure in context, even if he spent £500,000 a day every day for the rest of his life he would be 100 before it ran out.)

Thrills and entertainment – like love – are things you cannot buy, but you can buy the material goods that are likely to generate them. Just as buying diamonds for that special someone will likely get you some love.

Move on to the men revolving around Abramovich, from chief executive Peter Kenyon to manager Jose Mourinho, and from "superagent" Pini Zahavi to sporting director Frank Arnesen. While all are extremely successful in their own right, they are also aware that Abramovich could be their ticket to the next (and, as yet, largely unexplored) level. Any talented and ambitious man knows that his personal success is partly dictated by the resources at his disposal. Because Abramovich's resources are unmatched in the game today, each of the four has a strong vested interest in gaining and maintaining the Russian's affections.

But, as in any family, there can be only one favourite son. The quartet are well aware of that, which is why tensions are bound to arise. It is not a football drama, it is a family drama.

It is these two archetypal strands – a man trying to acquire what money cannot buy and children competing for their father's love – that make the situation so interesting. What happens next depends on how those stories develop. And because they are human – not footballing – stories, you have to look beyond the game for answers.

The first issue is whether Abramovich is finding what he sought when he bought the club. If the sole objective was trophies, then the answer is a resounding yes. If it was proving that a man could come from outside the game with a wad of cash, have the nous to hire some of the best in the business and be successful, then it is also yes.

But what if the Russian was looking for something else? Or if, after four years, new priorities have emerged – such as, for example, being entertained, having big-name players or seeing his side loved and admired by people other than Chelsea fans? Those are legitimate questions, and, viewed through that lens, it could be argued that Mourinho is not meeting those goals. The Portuguese has turned Chelsea into an outstanding side, but not one that would be mistaken for Johan Cruyff's Barcelona "Dream Team" or Arrigo Sacchi's Milan or even Vicente Del Bosque's Galacticos.

Apart from Michael Ballack and Andrii Shevchenko – who, according to the usual whispers, were "club" signings rather than being hand-picked by the manager – Mourinho has opted for the rising star, rather than the ready-made superstar. Then there is the popularity issue. Some argue that successful sides are bound to be unpopular and, to some degree, that may be true. But history is full of great sides who were successful and were loved by opponents and the media alike. Mourinho, on the other hand, has a history of forthright comments and behaviour that has alienated the press, reflecting inevitably on the club and the owner.

You can flip it around and look at it from Mourinho's perspective, too. Arguably, no coach in the history of the game has been this successful this early in his career –12 titles in less than six seasons. He has nothing to prove to anyone. But he may relish a new challenge elsewhere, particularly if, as has been suggested, he senses that the mood at boardroom level is changing and begins to believe that Abramovich's priorities are now different – that a load of silverware alone is not enough to keep him happy.

Mourinho restricted

Then there is the issue of control. Mourinho has made it abundantly clear that at Stamford Bridge his influence is restricted to the first-team playing squad. He is not the all-powerful "boss" who oversees every aspect of the club, such as Sir Alex Ferguson at Manchester United and Arsene Wenger at Arsenal.

Arnesen is in charge of the youth set-up (and there is a very obvious demarcation line between him and Mourinho). Zahavi negotiates most of Chelsea's transfer deals, and Kenyon, based on what we saw last summer, is the man with Abramovich's ear, who identifies many of the big signings. Given all that, might Mourinho not be tempted to go elsewhere?

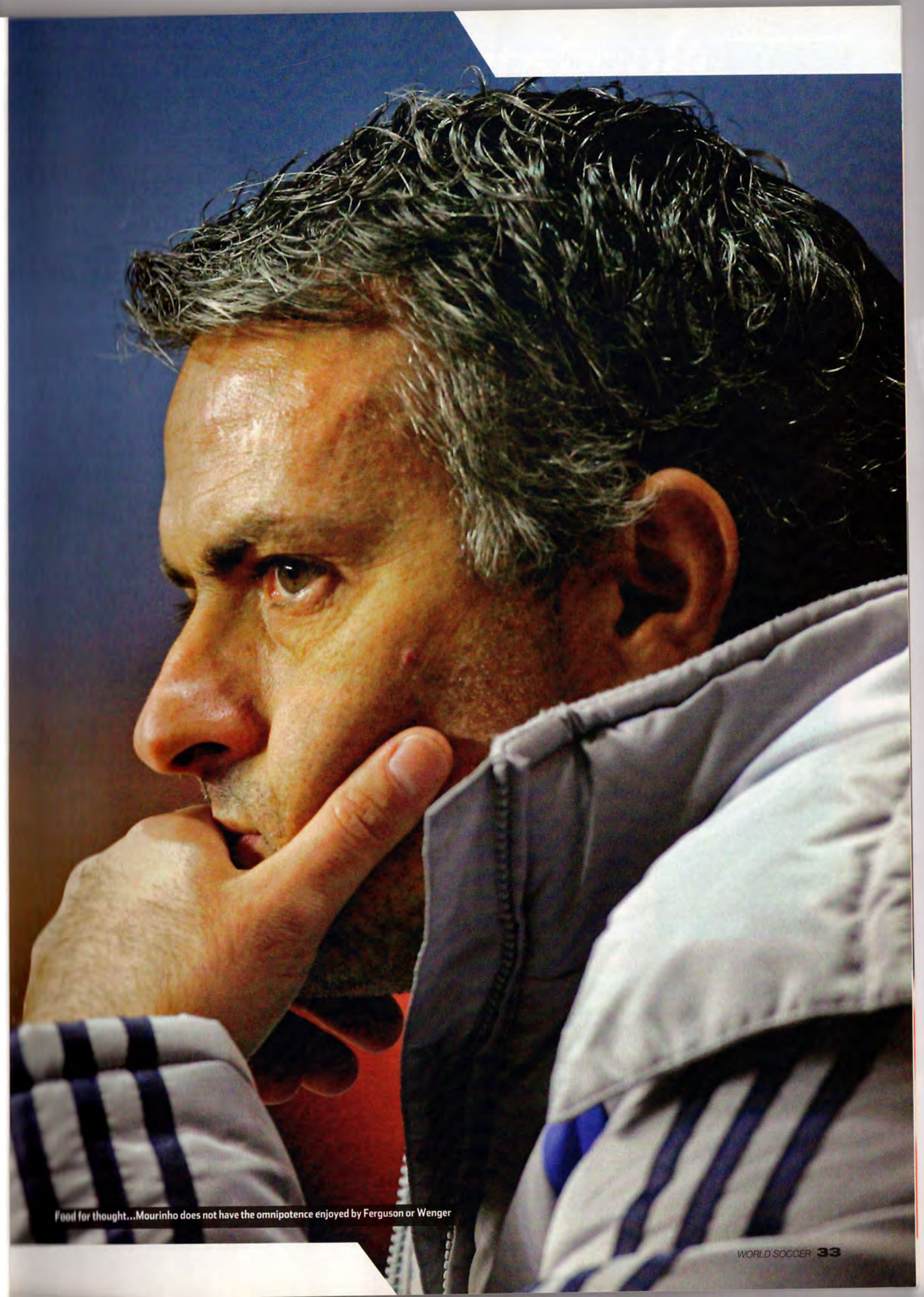
The club have been aware of this risk for some time. When Kenyon was brought on board, his brief was to turn Chelsea into a self-sustaining big club that could be successful year after year, whoever the manager.

Arnesen, whose track record in spotting and developing young talent is exceptional, was hired to facilitate this self-sustainability, by turning Chelsea's youth system into the kind of assembly line of talent seen at Barcelona or Arsenal or PSV Eindhoven.

This would ensure that Chelsea can be successful without Mourinho. And, incidentally, that is why Mourinho does not have the kind of omnipotence enjoyed by Ferguson and Wenger – Chelsea have to have a Plan B that does not include the Portuguese.

Then there is Zahavi. While not directly employed by Chelsea, he is one of the football men whom Abramovich knew and trusted before he got involved. His job is to broker deals and he is judged on whether he can deliver the right players at the right price.

"What if Abramovich is looking for something other than just trophies – or if, after four years, new priorities have emerged?"



Food for thought...Mourinho does not have the omnipotence enjoyed by Ferguson or Wenger

And so you have four men with four different briefs, each vying for the respect and affection of Abramovich. In an ideal world, all four would collaborate – one man's success would fuel the others' – and all would rise together. But that is not how human nature works necessarily. There can be only one favourite son, and when things go wrong, blame has to somehow be apportioned between the four.

Of course, whether things have gone wrong depends on what Abramovich wants and expects. If his priorities have, in fact, shifted a bit, it is easy to conclude that, short of winning the Champions League in style (which may yet happen), the owner's goals will not have been met. And that is when the internal inquest is likely to begin.

Will the four stand up as one, promising to work together to do a better job next season? Or will the blame game begin as Abramovich seeks answers to certain obvious questions? These would include: Who thought it would be a good idea to go into the season with just three central defenders? Who let William Gallas get away? Why haven't more players come through the ranks? Did Chelsea pay too much for Ballack and Shevchenko? Are Chelsea being penalised – both commercially and on the pitch – by the club's image, which is not exactly first rate?

It is tough to predict what will happen. But if Mourinho decides he has had enough and seeks out a new challenge elsewhere, it should not come as a surprise. ●

Gabriele Marcotti is the UK correspondent for Italy's Corriere dello Sport *newspaper*

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SIX OF THE BEST...candidates to replace Mourinho

1 Guus HIDDINK

The Dutchman has been seen as Chelsea's manager-in-waiting since taking charge of Russia last July and being given the use of Roman Abramovich's jet to commute to Moscow. Hiddink is a winner and no respecter of big egos, but his sides are not noted for attractive football. A strained relationship with Frank Arnesen from the PSV days is a minus, too.

2 Roberto MANCINI

Currently guiding Internazionale to new heights in Serie A. Speaks passable English having had a brief spell as a player at Leicester but has so far insisted that he wants to stay in Milan.

3 Juande RAMOS

In the space of two seasons, the rising star of Spanish coaching has built a Sevilla side that play exciting, winning football. Speaks good English and is keen on a move to England. His attacking ways would find favour with Abramovich, but a lack of Champions League experience would count against him.

4 Carlo ANCELOTTI

A winner as a player and coach with Milan, where his attacking instincts have gone against the grain of Serie A. Has shown he can handle big-name players and a strong president, but his lack of English is a problem.

5 Marcello LIPPI

Italy's World Cup-winning coach will be back on the market this summer and is looking for a big club job (see interview, page 44). He insists his lack of English will not be a problem. Has never coached outside Italy.

6 Didier DESCHAMPS

Young and hungry but already has bags of experience, having taken Monaco to the 2004 Champions League Final and led Juventus to the top of Serie B this season. Won everything as a player, but may want to try his hand in Serie A, presuming Juve are promoted this summer. A former Chelsea player.

Gavin Hamilton

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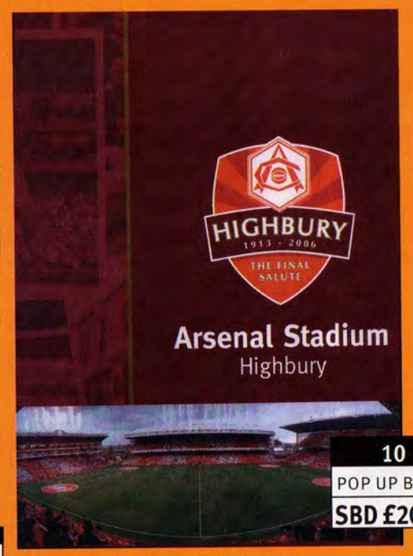

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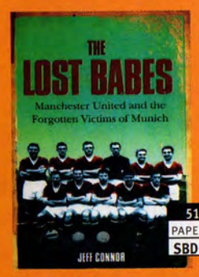

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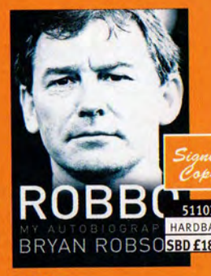

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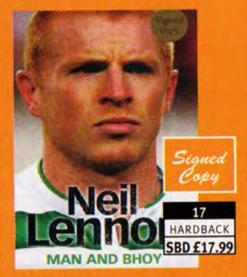

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The Ronaldinho enigma

The world's best player is under more pressure than ever before. Is it time to give Roni a break? By Sid Lowe

A HUGE, mischievous grin crept across Ronaldinho's face and a glint appeared in his eye. He pulled off his shirt and strutted towards the touchline, barely able to stifle a giggle as he made his way across the Camp Nou turf, applauded by rapturous Barcelona fans after a 3-0 demolition of Athletic Bilbao. As he strutted, he strained slightly, sucking in his stomach to show off a muscular torso, rippling with athletic power.

And then he started to roll down his shorts. A little at first, then a lot. The grin got wider as the shorts got lower and you wondered when it would stop. When it finally did, Ronaldinho's washboard now complemented by the sharp definition of his abdominal muscles, the message was clear: Are you calling me fat?

Just in case anyone hadn't got it, the Brazilian stopped by Canal Plus's touchline reporter and said in that characteristic, whispering, high-pitched giggle of his: "People saw me in the street and told me to eat less, but I looked in the mirror and thought I looked all right."

Barca coach Frank Rijkaard added: "I hope they took lots of pictures of him because he looked all right to me."

He certainly did. Against Bilbao, Ronaldinho's magic had returned: he had provided an assist, left one opponent so furious at his abject humiliation that he was moved to warn the Brazilian not to try it on again, and was a crossbar's width from scoring the goal of the season. With Samuel Eto'o back in the starting line-up for the first time since September, Barca's football, all fluid movement and rapid interchanges, had also returned.

But three days earlier the media were calling him fat, there had been little sign of a smile, and a wobbly belly instead of a rippling six-pack. Ronaldinho's shirt-removing, short-rolling gesture was a direct response to the photographs and criticisms that had filled the newspapers in the wake of the 2-1 defeat by Liverpool in the Champions League first leg.

In particular, it was a response to the use of contrasting photos of the Brazilian – of the descent-into-tubbiness strip in *El Periodico* and the compare-and-contrast in *AS*: on the left, a post-match shirtless Ronaldinho in November 2003; on the right, a post-match shirtless Ronaldinho in February this year. True, the first photo was sharper and brighter, and the Brazilian's posture in the second did him few favours and he may have been breathing out. But there was no escaping the bottom line: his figure had changed dramatically for the worse. He was, well, fat.

Taking the strain... Samuel Eto'o's absence put even more pressure on Ronaldinho, who also appeared to have put on weight (below, after the first leg against Liverpool)

The fact that Ronaldinho could return to an athletic shape so quickly suggested that perhaps his condition was not as bad in the Liverpool game as it had been made to look, that with a little effort he could get back to his fighting weight (it was said he'd lost three kilos in as many days). But it also showed that he had weight to lose and that he had been sensitive to the criticism. And, the critics said, the fact he played so well against Athletic as a suddenly slimmer man also showed that if he had got himself fit earlier, he might have enjoyed a better season. Others merely dismissed the Athletic performance as a one-off against a poor side.

Ronaldinho, on the face of it, has been exceptional this season. He was La Liga's second top scorer going into March, with 16 goals in 24 games, compared to 17 in the whole of last season's 38-game campaign, nine the season before and 14 in 2003-04. His pass completion rate and total number of passes are as good as ever, as is his shots-on-target tally.

But in the Champions League he had scored only twice, compared to 12, seven and seven in each of the past three seasons. And of his 16 league goals, six were from penalties, five from free-kicks and three from headers, leaving just two with his feet from open play – even if one was an outrageous overhead kick.

Few assists

And Ronaldinho simply isn't making Barca play. He had produced just three assists in the League (compared to 11 last season) and has been involved in fewer of his team's moves than in any of his previous three seasons there.

Nor has he had the wow factor. Last season, *Don Balon* magazine rated him the top player in La Liga by a big margin. At the end of February this season, he was not even in the top 25.

The smile is gone, the frustrated appeals for fouls have increased and he is not getting away from his markers like he once did. Roni is not quite right. Barca fans spotted it early on. According to an October poll in the Catalan newspaper *Sport*, 69 per cent wanted him left out of the side.

But the fans wanted to protect him; they wanted him left out so he could rest, they didn't want him dropped.

The pressure they impose upon him is born of concern, not anger.

Ronaldinho has been under intense pressure this season. The FIFA World Player of the Year performed poorly at the World Cup and has yet to really shake off that disappointment.

Ronaldinho has never been a diligent trainer but this season the wicked whispers have grown in intensity; the fast-living reputation that overshadowed his football at Paris Saint-Germain has returned.

Never was that clearer than in Eto'o's now infamous outburst, when he accused Ronaldinho of not giving everything for the team. The Brazilian, Eto'o subsequently suggested, attends just eight of every 50 training sessions. Others have talked of him having a string of girlfriends and of late nights.

But the effect of Barca's preparation, or lack of it, has also come under scrutiny. Rather than undergo serious pre-season training, the club went on a lucrative tour of the United States that has been widely criticised by the players.

Ronaldinho has now played for two years without a break. While Ronaldo was allowed to sit out the Confederations Cup in 2005, Ronaldinho played off the back of his club season. This summer he was in the US before he had done a single jog.

"Ronaldinho has not had a pre-season like other players," says Brazil coach Dunga. "He came straight back from the World Cup and immediately boarded a plane for the US, where he started playing matches with Barca. He was straight back into it without doing the adequate physical work you need before the season starts."

Earlier this season, Ronaldinho said: "I'm not a machine – and I am working on getting closer to 100 per cent fitness," but he has never quite got there.

On a treadmill

His exhaustion is psychological as well as physical. He feels he is on a treadmill, that everything is growing harder. Eto'o's long absence because of injury made his task more difficult, both in terms of the football (he has less space and fewer options without the Cameroonian) and the pressure (he is expected to lead the team alone). "Whenever things go wrong, it's Ronaldinho who bears the brunt," says Leo Messi. "We shouldn't pile all the responsibility on to him."

So shattered is the Brazilian that he asked Dunga to consider leaving him out of the national team's less important games. He went so far as to contemplate walking away from the Brazil set-up altogether.

The politics of Barcelona, played out in the boardroom, the dressing room and in the press, have also affected Ronaldinho. When Eto'o spoke of the division of Barcelona into two camps (see Headliners, page 21), he drew attention to the fact that the much-heralded unity of the club was a myth. He also blew apart the image of Eto'o and Ronaldinho as brothers in arms.

Apart from anything else, Ronaldinho is seen as symbolising the circle of former vice-president Sandro Rosell, the one-time Nike executive who was instrumental in bringing him to Camp Nou and who very publicly fell out with president Joan Laporta. The latter is keen for Ronaldinho to stay but his unofficial adviser, Johan Cruyff, has long been a critic, and some on the board are more than willing to cash in on the Brazilian. Meanwhile, the promised new contract has yet to materialise.

Then there are family matters to consider. Ronaldinho lives in Casteldefells, on the beach just south of the city. The home is the hub of a real family industry, a multi-million dollar concern run by those closest to him. His sister Deisi is his secretary, his uncle is his chauffeur, his mother Miguelina the home-maker and chef, his brother Roberto his agent.

Football apart, no role is more important than that of his brother, who controls every aspect of Ronaldinho's professional life, from sponsorship to contracts. The player once joked that he does not even know how much he earns because Roberto is in charge of the money, and the feeling is that Ronaldinho does not have control of his playing destiny either. He insists he wants to stay at Barcelona but the rumours are Roberto is preparing the way for a big-money move – with Milan at the head of his list.

All the while, the pressure builds on the world's finest player. His standards are not like anyone else's, and Barca are not like any other club. It will take more than a slim-line stomach to climb back to the summit – and Roni knows it.

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums

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THE INNER CIRCLE

THE AGENT
Brother Roberto de Assis, a former player with Cruzeiro, handles all Ronaldinho's business and commercial interests.

THE SECRETARY
Sister Deisi handles all the requests for interviews and public appearances.

THE HOME-MAKER
Mum Miguelina prepares all Ronaldinho's meals. His favourite is meat with rice and beans.

Persuasive...Rosell

THE ADVISER
Sandro Rosell, the former Nike marketing executive who persuaded Ronaldinho to join Barca instead of Man United. A former Barca vice-president who fell out with president Joan Laporta. Said to be plotting a presidential challenge.

Family matters...Ronaldinho with, from left, sister Deisi, brother Roberto and mother Miguelina

'I am a footballer, not an actor'

You have won practically everything you can in football. How do you see all the success in your life?

It's been amazing seeing all my dreams come true. I am extremely happy to have won so many awards and titles but I hope there are more to come. My life has changed but it's been easy to deal with because I feel I am the same person I was before the fame and fortune.

How has your life changed since joining Barcelona?

Of course, people recognise me everywhere now so I lost a lot of privacy, but I have to accept it. It's just part of my life and I try to lead a normal life, even knowing that people will give me attention.

You are constantly in the media spotlight. How do you deal with that?

I know I am lucky to do what I love and to be who I am so it's not that hard dealing with it. The only thing that's hard sometimes is knowing that everything I say is analysed in detail, so sometimes I am a bit shy in interviews. But overall I try to stay calm and try to be myself.

People come from all over the world to watch you play at Camp Nou. How much pressure do you feel to play well all the time?

There is pressure, but I thrive on it. People know what I can do and that motivates me to play my best. I don't look at it from a negative standpoint. If there is a whole stadium expecting me to do something special, then it's because they believe I can do it, and that gives me more belief. Obviously, I can't be great all the time and that makes me sad, but that's life.

How much do you practise your moves and free-kicks?

I try to practise all aspects of my game every day – penalties, free-kicks, everything. Normally I try to take 50 free-kicks and 50 penalties in every session so I feel comfortable in match situations. As far as dribbling is concerned, it's tougher because in games you have three seconds to improvise and if a defender adapts well to your move, then you have to make something else up. So it's easier to practise set-pieces because it's all about concentration.

What about the free-kick you scored against Werder Bremen in the Champions League. Did you mean to put it under the wall like that?

I had thought about scoring a goal like that. I saw Rivaldo and some other players do it. I was waiting for the right time, and since all the Bremen players were very tall, I thought it might be a way to catch them off guard. I am going to keep practising it and hopefully I'll score again like that.

You are the face of many products and you appear in many commercials. Is it hard managing the business side of your career? Does it affect your focus on football?

That area of my career is managed by my sister and my brother so I can concentrate only on football. They make those extra-curricular arrangements and then I try to fit it in to my schedule, but my priority is football and playing well. I am lucky enough that most advertisements have me juggling, which I am good at. I don't have to memorise too many lines, which is great because I am a footballer, not an actor. Overall, I normally have fun doing commercials – it's something different.

People criticised Ronaldo when he was at Real Madrid because they thought he was too concerned with personal commitments and no longer giving 100 per cent on the pitch. Are you afraid that might happen to you?

What happened to Ronaldo is different to what is going on in my life. He was blamed for Real Madrid's problems and bad results, and the media created an image of the player that didn't correspond to the truth. I know Ronaldo very well, I know he still focuses on football, so it's unfair what people say about him. As far as I'm concerned, my priority is football and training, and extra-curricular activities come after.

What about your relationship with Samuel Eto'o? He appeared to criticise you after you had suggested he was putting his interests before those of the team.

It was a sequence of misunderstandings. One person interpreted the other person's comments in a wrong way, so he over-reacted, and that's what created the confusion. The matter has been resolved now and we are stronger than before. Everyone will learn from what happened and the squad will unite.

What has been the highlight of your career to date?

Winning the World Cup was a dream come true – I had thought about it since I was a child – and the Champions League and the Confederations Cup are titles I cherish. But I believe the best is yet to come.

What about the lowest point?

It was really hard being knocked out of the World Cup last year because everyone expected us to do really well, and we did have a fantastic team and could have won the title again. But the toughest moment may have been when I left Brazil for the first time and moved to France to play for Paris Saint-Germain. I didn't get a game right away and it was difficult to be on the sidelines in those first few months and at the same time try to adjust to a new lifestyle.

Would you agree that you were not as influential as normal at last year's World Cup? Were you tired after a long season?

All this belongs to the past. For me, it was a big disappointment, and on my website I begged the fans' forgiveness for the fact that Brazil were not able to achieve success. A lot of things had an influence, but we have learned a lesson and will try and do better in the future. ●

Interview by Pedro Pinto

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worldsoccer.com

RONI IN NUMBERS

£13.3m
Estimated income in 2005-06, according to *Forbes* magazine.

£5.7m
Salary from Barcelona.

2010
Expiry date of his Barca contract.

£84.3m
The buyout clause in the contract.

£16.9m
Fee paid for him by Barca to Paris Saint-Germain in 2003.

15
Advertising contracts, including Pepsi, Nike, Cadbury Schweppes, Danone and Electronic Arts.

Commercial break...Ronaldinho volleys in a Nike promotional shoot

10R

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Sea change

Paddy Agnew tracks down Italy's World Cup-winning coach to the Tuscan coast, where he is taking a break from football

THE PASSEGGIATA Viale Regina Margherita, the celebrated promenade in the Tuscan seaside resort of Viareggio, has the air of a famous watering hole whose glories may be on the decline. It is the sort of place where, in mid-winter, you could reasonably expect to encounter more pensioners on the seafront than idle rich. Retirement here is a tempting possibility.

Just at the moment, you might well run into Viareggio's most famous son, World Cup-winning coach Marcello Lippi. Don't be fooled, though – he is merely on a sabbatical and has no intention of retiring just yet.

Since you left the Italy job you've started lecturing university students. How did that come about?

At first after stepping down I found myself receiving lots of different prizes and awards, and then I started to get invitations from universities. Today, people consider the ability to create a team to be of fundamental importance and so people [universities and companies] have been asking me to give them my version of things. After all, Italy made a big impression on people in Germany.

I really enjoy talking to young people because I find them very enthusiastic. I'm not a professor, I'm not a teacher, but I go to tell them about my experiences.

But you're not thinking of retiring from coaching altogether?

I'm 59, what am I going to do – sit at home and go for bike rides? I intended to take a break after the World Cup but you never want to give up on the possibility of other big wins, especially after you have experienced something like winning a World Cup.

I've been contacted by seven or eight clubs so far – none of them Italian by the way – but I said no to all of them because I didn't want to start a new job in mid-season. If in April or May a club comes looking for me with a serious set of plans, then I'll sit down and talk to them, about lots of things – their plans, about the quality of life [in the local city] and then we'll see. The club doesn't necessarily have to be the sort that is aiming to win the league title. I'll be quite glad to coach again in the 2007-08 season, but for the time being I haven't missed football. It was my choice to take a break, a decision I made before the World Cup.

You've already turned down the Libya and Mexico federations. Could you see yourself leading another national team?

I think it would be difficult for a foreign federation to come looking for me. It would be difficult for me, too, because it was such a huge joy to win the World Cup with Italy that I would find it very strange to go and coach another national side. In the future, who knows, but for the time being it is much more likely to be a club.

Then, too, there are countries with such a strong tradition that they have never had a foreigner as coach, correctly it seems to me. It's right that such countries are coached by one of their own, by someone who knows everything about that country. Italy is one such country and so is Spain.

Would England be another such country and would that explain the difficulties encountered by Sven Goran Eriksson as manager?

Eriksson is one of the best coaches in the world but I don't really know what happened to him there or why the English FA appointed him in the first place. It is curious, though, that you find foreigners in charge of so many English clubs – Mourinho at Chelsea, Benitez at Liverpool, Wenger at Arsenal, and others.

I've always said that national teams reflect the good and bad qualities of their nation's football, the mentality of a nation's football. It can happen that a particular coach can change a team's attitude – for example, a South American side can become much more "European", more cautious, more concrete, but at the end of the day, they play their own football.

Did Italy play their own football to win the World Cup in Germany?

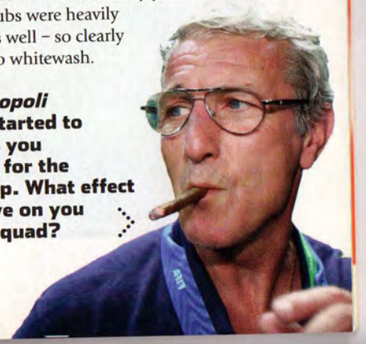
We played a traditionally strong Italian game, we demonstrated a football style that was not just about defence but also more modern, in keeping with how the majority of teams now play in Italy. People who think Italian football is just about defence are either ill-informed or dishonest. You cannot analyse Italian football as if it were the Fifties or Sixties. There are plenty of Italian teams now that are attack-minded. Nobody opts just to defend and hoof the ball upfield.

There's no country in the world with a better standard of coaching. At every level, Italian coaches are very good – technically, tactically, athletically – and that's because lower-level football in Italy is very, very competitive, much more so than in lots of other countries.

Has Italian football's credibility suffered because of last summer's *Calciopoli* match-fixing scandal?

No. Around the world, people see Italy as the world champions. As for corruption, other countries such as Portugal and Germany have had their problems, but this doesn't mean their football has lost credibility. These are difficult times, but if the football movement is strong, it will overcome them. The sight of a club such as Juventus in Serie B should make everyone stop and think. People say Italian football's problems have been swept under the carpet, but it doesn't seem that way to me. Juve were relegated to Serie B, they were stripped of two titles and directors were banned for many years; other big clubs were heavily penalised as well – so clearly there was no whitewash.

The *Calciopoli* scandal started to unfold as you prepared for the World Cup. What effect did it have on you and the squad?



"The *Calciopoli* scandal did not put us off our stride because we had put together a really strong group of players. In any case, when we got to Germany we had plenty of other things to think about"

Well, it did not put us off our stride, and for one reason – we had put together a really strong group. Remember, this squad had travelled to Holland and beaten the Dutch, who hadn't lost at home for two years and who at that time [November 2005] were one of the most in-form teams in Europe. We played with real authority and presence to win 3-1. Then we beat Germany 4-1 in Florence [the following March], playing really well. After that game there was a strong belief in the squad, the realisation that we were not necessarily the strongest team in the world, but certainly a very strong one.

If we had been a weak squad, *Calciopoli* would probably have wiped us out, but we were very strong mentally, and the lads managed to turn everything that had happened into positive energy. In Italy, before the World Cup, everyone was worried about the scandal, but when we got to Germany we had plenty of other things to think about. The important thing for us was our two years of work and results, the sense of being a good team. We showed we were not only very determined and enthusiastic but also had class players, were well organised, and able to play with four strikers.

Then, too, confidence builds as you progress. We got a big boost from winning our group and thus avoiding Brazil. We got a big fillip from beating Australia even with a man down and with a last-minute penalty, which clearly suggested the gods were on our side, and then we beat Ukraine easily. At that point we had much more self-belief than in the first round, so we really fancied ourselves against Germany in the semi-final, even if we were playing them in Dortmund, where they are practically unbeatable. We were helped, too, by the memory of that win in Florence.

Were you disappointed to beat France only on penalties in the Final?

Not at all. Penalties represent a skill that, according to the rules, can decide a game. I've been through plenty of penalty shoot-outs in my career – with Juventus against Ajax in 1996 I won a Champions League; at Old Trafford in 2003 I lost one [to Milan]. But a shoot-out says a lot about a team's mentality, its self-belief. For example, in Rome against Ajax, all my players looked me in the eye and told me they wanted to take one of the penalties because they all wanted to be part of the success. At Old Trafford, after a match in which we had not played that well, nobody looked me in the eye, some of the players were looking into the grandstand, some were looking down at their boots, so much so that I thought at one point, what do you want lads, will I take all five kicks myself? The point is that at Old Trafford, my players didn't believe in it and, accordingly, we lost the shoot-out.

In Berlin, all the players wanted to take a penalty, even [keeper Gigi] Buffon said to me: "If you need me, I'll take one, boss." When I saw that, I was convinced we would win. But we did not prepare in any special way for the penalties, we didn't practise them.

The Final, of course, was marred by the infamous Zidane-Materazzi butt incident. Did that not help Italy?

To those who say we were much advantaged by the sending-off of Zidane, I would say this – he was sent off in extra-time, when the match was almost over. Sure, he would have taken a penalty instead of somebody else, but certainly not instead of [David] Trezeguet, who would still have missed his. So it changed nothing.

Of course, it was disappointing for all of us that he was sent off. I had him as a player for four seasons at Juventus and, after Maradona, he was the best player of the past 20 years. Mind you, with Juve there were a few occasions when he lost his head.

What happened in Berlin takes nothing from Zidane's greatness as a player. Indeed, I spoke to him during the warm-up and told him he should re-think his retirement, that a player of his class should retire only when he could no longer walk, and he just laughed. I didn't talk to him after the game.

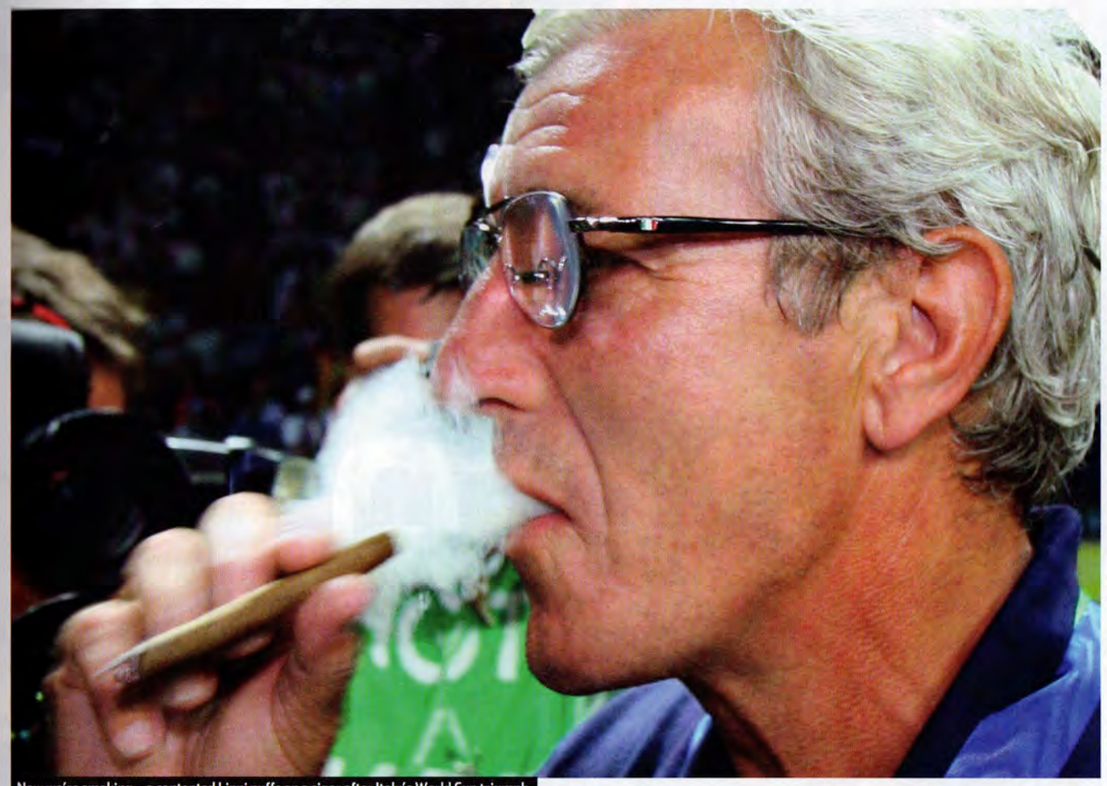
You won five Serie A titles and a Champions League trophy with Juventus. Where do you see them going from here?

First, Juve should be thinking now of winning Serie B, and only that. What is certain is that the club has the know-how, the intelligence and the experience necessary for them to build a team as strong as in the past.

Internazionale have been making merry in Serie A this season after the match-fixing punishments to other clubs but do you think the campaign has been devalued or are Inter a really good team?

The story is the same now as it was last summer. We knew then that it would be a Serie A without Juventus and with Milan, Fiorentina and Lazio penalised. So we were all tipping Inter as the likely winners, and saying Roma would be the only ones to run them close, with maybe one of the provincial teams such as Palermo showing strongly. And that's exactly the way it has been. Inter have the strongest squad this season and seem very, very determined, more so perhaps than in other seasons.

Spot on...Fabio Grosso sends Fabien Barthez the wrong way in the shoot-out to win the World Cup for Italy


Now we're smoking...a contented Lippi puffs on a cigar after Italy's World Cup triumph

Which other teams have impressed you this season?

Well, I'm certainly a big admirer of Manchester United and Alex Ferguson. He has been able to win a lot, yet at the same time continually renew the team before it gets to the end of its cycle. Even if they have not won so much in recent years, this season they are back on top and look very strong.

What are your views on Jose Mourinho?

The good coach is the one who gets the best out of his players, who gets a mid-table side to finish second or third in his league. Mourinho has certainly done that and more with Porto and Chelsea in recent years and, what's more, without having been a great player himself, which is something that can really help you when you get to coach a big team.

What about the appointment of Michel Platini, a former Juve player, as UEFA president?

It is positive that a young man like him, a former great player, someone who knows football from the roots up, gets elected as UEFA president. That's a sign that something is moving. After all, a former player will always see football in a different light from others.

You have won just about everything as a coach but there were struggles early on in your career.

That's true. The worst moment for me was being sacked by Siena in C1 [third division]. It was my first season at that level and I thought maybe I would never coach again. But I stuck at it and I had a reverse experience, going from Serie C [with Carrarese] to Serie A [Cesena].

It made me understand something fundamental – that being sacked is not only part of a coach's job but also that it is useful because it lets you unwind, chill out, gives you time to travel, to look at different things to improve yourself. It's a good thing to have six months off every now and then.

Even after finding success, coaches still tend to be judged by pretty exacting standards.

Yes. I took Juventus to four Champions League finals [he won the first and lost the others] yet somebody asked me after the fourth [against Milan in 2003] if I considered myself a loser. Yes, I said, a successful loser. To get to the Final that year, we had beaten Barcelona in the quarter-finals and Real Madrid in the semi-finals, then you go and lose with the last kick of the shoot-out and someone tells you that you are a loser. I wonder about people sometimes...

So where to now? Years ago, when you were at Juventus, you told me that you would never coach in England because you didn't speak English and could not conceive of coaching via an interpreter. Does that still hold true?

Players, even in England, now speak different languages. I used to speak to Alex Ferguson only via an interpreter but recently we've discovered that we both speak a little French and we talk to one another in that language. Lots of players have played in Italy or have travelled around, so they understand different languages. A few years ago, I would have seen the lack of English as a huge problem for me; now, less so. ●

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Beckham in MLS: a force or a farce?

Paul Gardner reflects on the impact LA Galaxy's new signing could have on American soccer in the new season – and beyond

DAVID BECKHAM HAS assured us that, as far as he is concerned, his move to Los Angeles Galaxy is not about the money. I'm inclined to believe him. And I believe that he does have a genuine desire to "improve the soccer...the standard of the game" in the United States.

But there are difficulties. Firstly, because the deal has received an almost insane amount of media attention, and 99.9 per cent of that has been focused on the alleged £500,000 a week that he will rake in. Secondly, because I don't think Beckham knows very much at all about the "standard of the game" in the USA.

The former England captain has become, overnight, the centre of attraction of football in the States because of his money, not because of his playing skills.

The initial response to his signing simply staggered Major League Soccer commissioner Don Garber, who described it as "far beyond anything we had imagined".

Within hours of the announcement of Beckham's coming, Galaxy had sold 1,000 season tickets – a pretty good indication that there is a football community out there that was simply waiting for MLS to make a move like this, to put a world star or two on show.

A perfect beginning, because MLS has long suspected – no, it has known – that the potential audience for professional football in this country is considerably larger than its 15,000-per-game average attendance suggests. Huge crowds for exhibition games featuring top European and (particularly) Mexican teams, World Cup television viewing figures that last year outdid baseball's world series – these undeniable statistics have bred a seething frustration at MLS. How to reach those fussy fans?

Beckham the answer

Suddenly it all looks so simple – Beckham is the answer. And he may well be. It could be that pro soccer in the USA has reached one of the famous "tipping points", that a major event such as Beckham is all that is needed to launch it onwards and giddily upwards.

Surely, if any one person can do it, it is Beckham. He has the looks, the glamour, the personality and – a not inconsiderable factor in the modern sports field – he's making a hell of a lot of money. That's something any sports fan can understand.

Stars in his eyes... an LA Galaxy fan rummages through the new season shirts at the club's Home Depot Center base

Sponsors love the guy – and the more sponsors who get interested in soccer, the healthier the sport gets. Same thing with television ratings. Beckham's presence will mean more money coming into MLS, which should translate into higher salaries and a greater willingness of other top players to play in the League.

So far so good. Now for the tricky part. Everything I've been banging on about has to do with image, publicity, marketing, glamour – Hollywood stuff, if you like, perfect for Los Angeles and perfect for the selling of soccer. But on the field – where the dark glasses and the designer jackets come off and the game itself begins – what of that? It won't, for sure, be the way Beckham seems to imagine it.

Man on a mission ...Beckham wants to help improve the standard of the game in the USA

For a start, there is a question mark about Galaxy. They were a poor team last season, and – apart from Beckham – they have done little to strengthen the side for the one that starts in April. For Beckham not to shrivel into a nine-day wonder after his arrival in the summer, he needs to be part of a winning team. He may not be, which would be the worst possible start to what he undoubtedly sees as the Beckham mission.

Anyway, it is somewhat arrogant to imagine that he can single-handedly, or single-right-footedly, effect positive changes throughout this huge country.

Even Pele, who arrived with a similar mission in 1975, didn't achieve that, and he was a far, far better player than Beckham. There was a problem right from the start, one that will arise with Beckham. How will the referees deal with him? Of course, there will be "no special treatment" assurances. Galaxy coach Frank Yallop has already informed the referees that Beckham knows how to handle himself in intense and difficult situations, and will not be dependent on special treatment from them.

No doubt. But Beckham is seen as MLS's most valuable asset – by a long chalk – and as its very future. Is it conceivable that there will not be hints, at least, that an uninjured Beckham is now the aim of the game? There is also the danger of reverse discrimination from referees, who will not want to be seen as pampering him. Pele suffered from some of this; in one notorious game in 1976, he exploded after being kicked constantly and committed an atrocious, highly un-Pele-like foul. The referee issued no cards to anyone.

Putting aside MLS's nightmare image of Beckham on a stretcher, his biggest obstacle to becoming a reference point for American soccer is his nationality.

English soccer missionaries in this country invariably get it wrong. Believe me, I've been studying the breed for over 40 years now, I know of what I speak. The problems start with the immigrant experience, which is lacking for the English: no new language to learn, so no need to bother about understanding a new culture. Anyway, the English believe they speak the language better than Americans. So they know the language and, of course, they know everything about soccer. A wonderfully fertile ground for arrogance, for refusing to acknowledge that the Brit approach to the game is only one of many.

Beckham already has an academy up and running in LA. The staff are mainly Brits. One of them recently told a colleague who had politely pointed out that "boots" is not the American word for soccer shoes: "Well, you'll have to get used to the new language." Very nice.

The academy actually makes a good starting point for identifying what Beckham will need to avoid if he is to do what he believes he could do – effect a sea change in the game in the USA.

I do not know how good Beckham's command of Spanish might be – it ought to be pretty good after three years in Spain. But bothering to learn foreign languages is not a British strength, and that is another of the problems from which Brit soccer coaches in the USA suffer. Again, this is an almost 100 per cent guarantee – none of them speaks Spanish.

Hispanic population

Let's hope Beckham can at least get by in Spanish. He's going to southern California, an area with a vast Hispanic population, most of them soccer-mad. And it is there that he can make a huge difference to the importance and, above all, to the direction of the sport in this country.

He will not do it through his academy. That is simply more of the same old stuff – we've got oodles of academies and soccer schools and soccer camps, most serving simply as places for parents to unload their kids during the summer. None of them does much good in a football sense. All of them (with the honourable exception of Brad Friedel's in Ohio) demand money. The Beckham academy charges £500 for a five-day residential course (you do get a pair of deep-sea diving boots, though). At that sort of price, Beckham will reach the same old clientele, the middle and upper-class suburban whites, the college kids. He will not get any Hispanic customers.

So a couple of crucial don'ts for Beckham in his quest to impact American soccer. Firstly, ignore the English soccer community in the States, forgo the pleasures of talking to all the Brits who hold down well-paid youth coaching jobs, even those who coach the pros. Secondly, forget about the academy.

He will find the average level of the American player quite sophisticated, a lot better than he probably suspects. Frankly, there is nothing revolutionary to be done there. With that realisation, the Beckham adventure could all too easily turn into a farce, nothing more than a travelling road show with Galaxy, and a fevered whirl of talk shows, front covers, poster-boy publicity, sexy interviews, shirt sales, photo ops, and so on. Plenty of money, but not much football.

To change the face of American soccer, he will have to strike out on his own, he will have to make waves. Where Beckham is needed, where he can be a force, is in championing the wonderful wealth of Hispanic talent in this country, and forcing the largely Europe-oriented soccer establishment to accept it as an equal partner in the development of the American game.

It will be difficult – and rather awkward. Because it's the other Los Angeles club – Chivas USA, who share the Home Depot stadium with Galaxy – that is the one supposedly devoted to promoting the Hispanic player.

But Beckham will surely have the clout to make his own rules. If he truly means what he says about "making a difference in the USA", it is towards the scandalously under-appreciated Hispanic soccer community that he must turn. The potential of that community is immense – it will be wonderfully ironic if it takes a Brit to see it realised.

MLS IN NUMBERS

10
the number of different club ownership groups for the 13-team 2007 season (compared to just three for the 10-team 2003 season)

4
the number of Hispanic coaching staff at MLS clubs (out of a total of 46)

5
new coaches at MLS clubs this season

£1.12m
the 2007 salary cap per club

7
soccer-specific stadiums in 2007

April 15
the final deadline for new player signings

Roll up, roll up...but the David Beckham Academy could price itself out of attracting the crucial clientele, the young Hispanics

Garber: 'We've opened up to the beauty of the world game'

Reasons to be cheerful...Don Garber

"THIS IS A PERIOD of unparalleled growth for our sport – I feel much better today than I did a year and a half ago." That's MLS commissioner Don Garber speaking, with a smile on his face and a twinkle in his eye.

Yes, the view from his swanky new offices on New York's Fifth Avenue is decidedly encouraging. He plays with a nice soccer image: "There's been a change – years ago it seemed when there were problems, things would generally fall on the negative side, but now the ball is bouncing to our feet."

Garber cites the case of Kansas City Wizards, a club that searched desperately for a new investor all last season. "Instead of having to move the franchise to another city, we've been able to find a local group to invest in the club. And we've been successful in broadening our ownership group."

In that last comment, Garber is referring to what used to be an embarrassment. Only four years ago, six of the League's 10 teams were owned by Phil Anschutz's AEG group, and three by the Hunt Sports Group. Today, the 13-team MLS has 10 different ownership groups.

OK, so how about this business of American rich guys buying up English clubs. Surely Garber would prefer them to be investing in MLS? He counters: "It helps us, as it means soccer is rated a 'buy'; it legitimises the sport in the minds of American fans. Malcolm Glazer, Randy Lerner, Tom Hicks and George Gillett getting involved is good for us."

There is also the possibility – suggested by the co-operation deal between Arsenal and Colorado Rapids – that the process might be reversed and that there might be English investment in MLS.

"We're not short of owners now," Garber says. "And, remember, we already have overseas investors – Red Bull from Austria and Chivas from Mexico. The important thing is that these are soccer people. Whether they own our teams or English Premier League teams, it's good for the sport."

Expansion plans – a pretty good yardstick for measuring the League's growth – remain on track. Toronto FC (pity about the boring name) are the new, 13th team this season, and the aim is still to have 16 teams by 2010.

This season will also – at long last – surely mark the end of soccer's days as a sport without a home. This year, seven teams will be playing in recently built soccer-specific stadiums: Chicago, Columbus, Los Angeles, Chivas USA, Dallas, Toronto and Colorado. This real-estate development means the clubs can also now make money from parking and food sales and from selling the naming rights: Colorado, for instance, will be playing in Dick's Sporting Goods Park – something of a mouthful, but the club has pleaded for the media not to use "any shortened or altered versions of this name".

Even when there's a problem – one that Garber admits "I lose sleep thinking about it" – it's a positive problem, one that marks a growing, maturing league: fixture congestion. The 2007 season is definitely jammed up. Between April 7 and October 21 each club will play 30 games, and in the middle of things the national team play in two major tournaments – the CONCACAF Gold Cup (June 6-24), on home soil, followed immediately by a guest appearance in the Copa America (June 26-July 15, in Venezuela). These two tournaments will mean prolonged absences for a number of top MLS players.

Americans abroad... Josh Wolff (above) is at 1860 Munich while Clint Dempsey (below) wears the colours of Fulham. But their former MLS clubs are now entitled to two-thirds of the transfer fee, rather than the League taking the lion's share

Television rights

Garber's insomnia seems warranted, but he can always turn to television for relief. There, it should be all smiles for him. After years of buying time on TV, MLS is now strong enough to demand rights fees from the networks. No fewer than four, in fact – ABC/ESPN, Fox Soccer Channel, HDNet (high-definition TV) and the Spanish-language Univision. According to *Sports Business Journal*, the four deals will net MLS more than £10million a year.

Another source of income for MLS, but one that Garber evidently does not feel totally comfortable with, is the sale of its players to European clubs. Midfielder Clint Dempsey has left New England Revolution for Fulham for a reported £1.5m, and former Kansas City Wizards forward Josh Wolff is now at 1860 Munich.

Garber is quick to stress: "We're not in the business of selling players, it's not in our business plan." Even so, a recent change in MLS regulations – allowing the selling club to retain two-thirds of the transfer fee (rather than the League taking the lion's share) – would seem to provide a cash incentive for clubs to sell players.

It is precisely the players who pose the biggest problem for MLS. It simply does not have enough top-level examples. Hence the passing of the designated player rule, which allows each club to sign one player outside the salary cap. It was this that allowed Galaxy to sign David Beckham.

So far, there has been no rush by other MLS clubs to add "DPs". Only New York Red Bulls have acted, bringing Claudio Reyna home from Europe. Garber professes to see wisdom at work, saying: "I'm pleased our teams are not thinking that the answer is one player signing. The worst thing that could happen with the DP rule is if they all rush out and spend gobs of money and then can't afford to pay their bills."

At the moment, the MLS salary cap is £1.12m per team, a miserly total by European standards, meaning MLS clubs should be beating the bushes for good, young and cheap players.

The problem lies with the coaches and it is a problem that has bedevilled MLS from the start. The MLS coaching ranks are virtually 100 per cent European or of pro-Europe persuasion.

Garber admits he finds that unsatisfactory. "It is a priority to diversify the coaching ranks," he says. "I will not regard my legacy as complete unless I've been successful in diversifying our entire league, from the league office to the players."

Adu unloaded

But the coaches are chosen by the owners, not Garber. American Tom Soehn, one of five new coaches this season, is in charge of DC United, the most Hispanic-oriented club in the League. They are also a club that have unloaded Freddy Adu, who, only three years ago, was seen as a 14-year-old miracle kid. His star has waned, and today he is an object lesson in the dangers of over-praising – to say nothing of over-promoting – teenage players. Adu will now play at Real Salt Lake – hardly the destination that was predicted for him in 2004.

If Adu has gone astray, not so the League, insists Garber. "Our country has finally opened up to the beauty of the world game – we're rapidly becoming a soccer nation," he says. "For MLS, there's still a very long way to go, this is still a marathon. If we think it's a sprint, we'll burn ourselves out. But we're focused on optimism.

"Our aim is to be a major, influential pro sport in America – something that will drive America's influence in the game globally. I believe we'll achieve that aim." ●

IN ATTENDANCE

The average crowd figure in the 11 seasons of MLS. It went up slightly last year on the previous campaign but was still some way off the opening season high.

1996	17,406
1997	14,603
1998	14,312
1999	14,282
2000	13,756
2001	14,961
2002	15,821
2003	14,898
2004	15,559
2005	15,108
2006	15,504

Welcome home...Chicago Fire fans celebrate the opening of the club's Toyota Park groun

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THE CLUBS

WESTERN CONFERENCE

CHIVAS USA
Coach Bob Bradley has departed for the national team but not before making a big-name signing – Amado Guevara from Red Bulls. The first signings of new coach Preki were Romanian defender Alex Zotinca and Cuban forward Maykel Galindo.

COLORADO RAPIDS
Keeper Joe Cannon has joined Galaxy in exchange for forward Herculez Gomez and defender Ugo Ihemelu. Panamanian Roberto Brown has been added "to solve the scoring drought", says coach Fernando Clavijo.

FC DALLAS
Steve Morrow takes over as coach from fellow Northern Irishman Colin Clarke. Midfielders Simo Valakari and Ronnie O'Brien have been ditched, goalscorer Carlos Ruiz still needs more support, and Canadian defender Adrian Serioux looked a canny signing until it was found he needed a knee operation and will miss half the season.

HOUSTON DYNAMO
If it ain't broke, don't fix it – so coach Dominic Kinnear has changed very little about the champions. Of the 14 players who won last year's Final against New England, 13 are still with the club – only defender Adrian Serioux has departed, for Dallas via Toronto.

LOS ANGELES GALAXY
David Beckham will have his work cut out – Galaxy missed out on the play-offs last year, after finishing only fifth in the Western Conference. The club still have the classy Landon Donovan, and coach Frank Yallop has added keeper Joe Cannon, but much more help is needed.

Joe Cannon (LA Galaxy)

REAL SALT LAKE
The arrival of Freddy Adu overshadows all else. It looks like the last-chance saloon for the young forward, now nearing his 17th birthday, who never lived up to his whizzkid publicity during three years at DC United. He rejoins coach John Ellinger, who had him in his Under-17 national team squad. But after two seasons of poor results Ellinger's job may well be on the line if things don't show a marked improvement.

Freddy Adu (Real Salt Lake)

EASTERN CONFERENCE

CHICAGO FIRE
After a mildly successful 2006 (they reached the MLS quarter-finals), a virtually unchanged squad looks set to ensure another season of moderate success under coach Dave Sarachan. Much is expected from Malian defender Bakary Soumare, a college signing.

COLUMBUS CREW
Had the lowest points total last season and a big improvement is unlikely as player changes have been few. Coach Sigi Schmid has added Danny O'Rourke, a combative but inexperienced midfielder.

DC UNITED
New coach Tom Soehn inherits a team with the highest Latino influence and last year's Most Valuable Player in MLS, Argentinian Christian Gomez. Soehn has added a Brazilian forward, Luciano Emilio.

KANSAS CITY WIZARDS
A new ownership group composed of local businessmen, and a new coach in Curt Onalfo, formerly an assistant to now-departed national team boss Bruce Arena. The team clearly underperformed last year, so improvement is likely – at least enough to make the play-offs for the first time since 2004.

NEW ENGLAND REVOLUTION
The midfield suffered a blow when livewire Clint Dempsey left for Fulham. Steve Nicol's Revs are uninspiring when it matters and have been losing finalists two seasons running. They could make it three in a row.

NEW YORK RED BULLS
Having lauded Amado Guevara as one of the best midfielders in MLS, new coach Bruce Arena traded him to Chivas USA. National team midfielder Claudio Reyna has returned from Europe, but the prospects for a lively team were not improved by two pedestrian signings – Austrian Markus Schopp and Dutchman Dave Van den Bergh.

Reyna & Arena (Red Bulls)

TORONTO FC
New everything – team, owners, coach, stadium. Owners Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment are described by coach Mo Johnston as "very well heeled". The Scot has signed forward Edson Buddle and three midfielders – Ronnie O'Brien, Uruguayan Jose Cancela and Welshman Carl Robinson.

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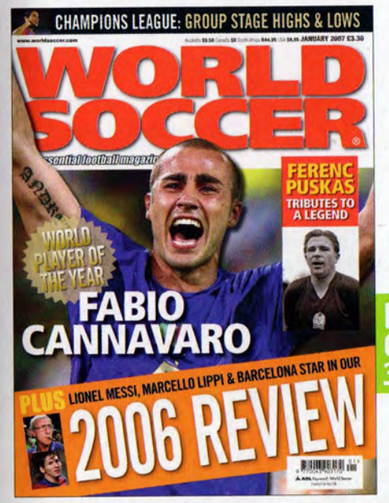

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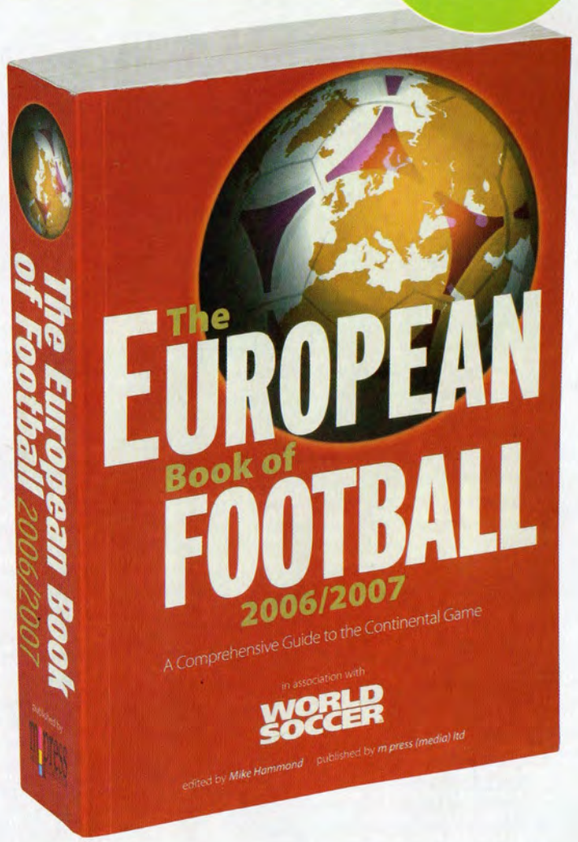

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TALENT SCOUT

TOMORROW'S STARS TODAY

Alexis SANCHEZ CHILE

Under-20s star en route to Udinese

IN THE SECOND half of 2006 South American football produced few sights finer than the Colo Colo front three. The glory went to Matias Fernandez, now parading his talents at Villarreal, the goals went to Humberto Suazo, but much of the credit for the Chilean side's fine form should go to Alexis Sanchez, who despite being a slightly-built teenager was much more than the junior partner.

The 18-year-old, who started out with Cobreloa, lacks the thrust of Fernandez, and, for the moment at least, the impressive finishing skills of Suazo. But his dazzling natural talent can make him every bit as dangerous – as he proved in the Final of the Sudamericana Cup, South America's equivalent of the UEFA Cup. Colo Colo played some inspirational football on their way to the decider, and though final opponents Pachuca of Mexico did their homework and reduced the effectiveness of Fernandez by slowing him down and forcing him on to his left foot, they found Sanchez harder to contain. Pachuca survived, winning 3-2 on aggregate, but the teenager set up both Colo Colo's goals, converted by Suazo, by running at the heart of the defence, beating and committing opponents and creating space for the shot on goal.

Such moments help explain Sanchez's growing reputation – and why Udinese have backed him to be a success in the Italian game.

The youngster may currently struggle to last 90 minutes, but he is stronger on the ball than his frame would indicate. He has terrific tight-space skills, is full of tricks in one-on-one situations and has the courage to use them where they are most effective, on the edge of the area. Unlike many dribblers, he can combine well, playing quick passes to his strike partner. And his subtle free-kicks offer another attacking threat.

Canny coach Nelson Acosta had no qualms about giving Sanchez his debut with Cobreloa in February 2005, two months after his 16th birthday. A few weeks later the secret was out after Sanchez scored two spectacular goals against Peru in the South American Under-17 Championship.

"I used to tell him not to play football in the street," said his mother, "because he would break windows and I had to put up with the neighbours complaining. Now people say to me: 'Do you remember when Alexis broke my window?'"

Sanchez was soon wreaking further destruction. Acosta returned to his previous post as coach of Chile's full national side and fast-tracked the youngster into the senior echelons. Of the handful of caps he has picked up, his only start came against Sweden in June last year, when he celebrated with a dribble that almost snapped a defender in half. "It was a move I'd always wanted to try," Sanchez said later. "I'd seen Ronaldinho do it."

Such audacity enchanted Udinese, who specialise in gambling on emerging South American talent. They signed him for £2million, but recognising he needed to complete his development in Chilean football sent him to Colo Colo on a year's loan. In the first half of that period, Sanchez won the Chilean closing championship and played in a major continental final. Now comes the Libertadores Cup, and with Fernandez in Spain, more responsibility will fall upon Sanchez's slender shoulders.

The youngster is unlikely to be overawed. He was in sparkling form in the South American Under-20 Championship in January, driving defenders to distraction as he helped steer Chile through to this year's World Youth Cup. Indeed, Sanchez looks ready for any challenge the game in his native continent can throw at him in 2007. Whatever happens, it will be invaluable experience on the road to Serie A.

Tim Vickery

FACT FILE

Club Colo Colo (on loan from Udinese, Ita)
Country Chile
Born December 19, 1988, in Tocopilla
Previous club Cobreloa
International debut April 2006, v New Zealand
International caps 5 (0 goals)
Honours Chilean closing championship 2006

Stefan BABOVIC SERBIA

Attacking midfielder is nation's bright new hope

STEFAN BABOVIC IS the great new hope of Serbian football, but the left-footed attacking midfielder had to leave Partizan Belgrade, where he came through the youth ranks, in order to gain recognition.

He made his debut for Partizan in spring 2004 aged 17 years and 50 days, but many at the club treated him with suspicion, mainly because of the status of his father, wealthy businessman Milija Babovic, whose company was Partizan's main sponsor.

Matters came to a head last August when he was demoted to the reserves by then coach Miodrag Jesic. Babovic quickly joined ambitious OFK Belgrade and soon established himself in the first team. He also showed his prowess in a Serbia shirt, scoring twice in the Under-21s' 5-0 victory over Sweden in October that qualified them for this summer's European Championship. "Stefan is a true jewel," said Under-21s coach Miroslav Djukic.

Babovic also appeared for the senior national team in an unofficial friendly against a Basque selection in Bilbao in December.

"Things are going well, but I'm not getting too carried away," he says. "I need to gain more muscle and improve my shooting with my right foot. But I will not change my style of play. Fans come to the stadium not for sliding tackles but to see attractive moves."

Juventus and Valencia are said to be among the clubs tracking Babovic's progress, though he wants to play another season in Serbia's top flight.

Vladimir Novak

FACT FILE

Club OFK Belgrade
Country Serbia
Born January 7, 1987, in Belgrade
Previous club Partizan Belgrade
Honours Serbo-Montenegrin League 2005 (Partizan)

Krisztian NEMETH HUNGARY

Teenage striker following great tradition

BUDAPEST CLUB MTK have had many outstanding forwards over the years – Alfred Schaffer, Imre Schlosser and Orth Gyorgy during the early part of the last century; Nandor Hidegkuti, the revolutionary deep-lying centre-forward of the unforgettable national team of the 1950s; Bela Illes in the 1990s; and now teenage sensation Krisztian Nemeth.

The 17-year-old has put in a string of excellent displays this season for his table-topping club – notably hitting a hat-trick in a 5-1 win over city rivals Vasas – and also has scored a hatful of goals for Hungary's Under-17 and Under-19 sides. Unsurprisingly, he has attracted some of Europe's biggest clubs, including Internazionale, Manchester United and Ajax.

"I've had several interesting offers but I haven't decided anything yet. There's no rush," says Nemeth, who joined MTK from Gyor in 2003 and was called up to the senior national squad (though didn't play) for the friendly with Canada last November.

National team coach Peter Varhidi has likened him to David Trezeguet, pointing up his coolness in the box, precise shooting with either foot and strength in the air. Yet Nemeth is much more than a finisher. He has huge potential as an all-round attacker, having the ability to make things happen on the flanks or when coming deep to link the play. Nemeth might not boast searing pace but he thinks quickly, is a fine dribbler and can escape the tightest of corners.

Nick Bidwell

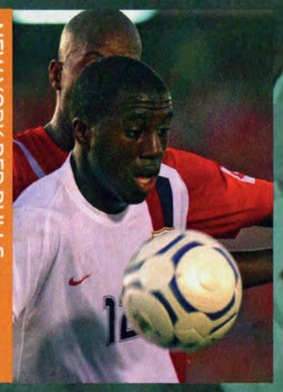
FACT FILE

Club MTK Budapest
Country Hungary
Born May 1, 1989, in Gyor
Previous club Gyor

SIX TO WATCH

Nick Bidwell selects the youngsters to keep an eye out for during the MLS season

NEW YORK RED BULLS



Josmer Altidore

All-action teenage forward who exploded on to the scene in the latter part of the 2006 campaign, notably hitting a long-range screamer in a win over Columbus. He also scored against DC United in the quarter-finals to become the youngest player to score in the play-offs (a week short of his 17th birthday). Born in the States to Haitian parents, he has represented America at Under-17 and Under-20 level.

REAL SALT LAKE

Mehdi Ballouchy

Talented young Moroccan midfielder who offers vision, snappy passing and a voracious workrate. Came through the youth set-up at Raja Casablanca before heading to America at the start of the decade to attend college. His father Driss used to play in the French second division.

CHIVAS USA

Jonathan Bornstein

Outstanding left-back deservedly voted MLS Rookie of the Year for 2006. Played in attack at UCLA but Chivas coach Bob Bradley, now in charge of the national team, had the bright idea to use him in defence. The 22-year-old is very quick, a wonderful dribbler, alert and no mean finisher – he scored on his senior USA team debut, a 3-1 win over Denmark in January.

DC UNITED

Bobby Boswell

Came from nowhere to step successfully into DC United's central defensive breach when excellent New Zealander Ryan Nelsen quit early in 2005 for Blackburn. Boswell, a graduate of Florida International University, was not considered good enough to feature in the MLS draft but DC took a chance on him anyway and he did so well that he made the League's All-Star XI for last season and has also now been capped. His cousin Adam Blake is a member of the *Frasier* cast.

FC DALLAS

Kenny Cooper

The Texan attacker (at bottom in picture) did not make the grade during a spell at Manchester United (2003-06), who loaned him to Academica in Portugal and Oldham. But he has not let the disappointment affect him, scoring 11 goals for Dallas last season and looking the part with his feisty attitude and liveliness. Like Bornstein, he scored on his senior national team debut against Denmark. Cooper's father, also Kenny, was a keeper with Blackburn and Dallas Tornado.

CHICAGO FIRE

Dasan Robinson

A highly impressive performer at the heart of the Chicago defence last term, catching the eye with his athleticism, speed, aerial ability and commitment. Robinson is also versatile, able to play up front, at full-back and in a wide midfield role. Went to college in Dayton, Ohio and was chosen by Chicago in the supplemental draft of January 2006. Reportedly on the verge of a national team call-up.

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Mike Plastow in Tokyo

Reds alert

Double winners Urawa Red Diamonds have the makings of being Japan's first super-club

PAULO WANCHOPE was the best-known arrival in Japanese football during the close season – how times change. The 30-year-old Costa Rica forward, who signed for FC Tokyo, may have played at two World Cups but he is hardly the sort of internationally renowned player that flocked to the budding J.League in the heady Nineties – figures such as Gary Lineker, Dragan Stojkovic, Pierre Littbarski, Salvatore Schillaci, Zico, Dunga, Leonardo and Careca.

The truth is that Japanese clubs are just not in the same league financially as Europe's big guns, who earn far more from television and other revenue streams. Urawa Red Diamonds, the top-earning club in the domestic game, had income of £25million in the 2005 financial year, a figure dwarfed by Real Madrid's £202m and Manchester United's £167m.

That said, the J.League has been expanding while managing to maintain its quality. It has grown from 10 clubs to 31 (in two divisions) in just 15 years, and although there are no new entrants this year, the queue to join is growing longer. Japan has more than two and a half times the population of England, which supports 92 league clubs, suggesting the expansion is not over yet.

And the J.League has long been strong enough to focus on its real business of playing football. At a press dinner last year, Guido Buchwald, the then Urawa Reds coach, claimed that the J.League would be the fifth best in Europe if Japan were a European country, saying that it was better than, for instance, the Dutch League. He didn't mean that Reds were stronger than PSV Eindhoven or Ajax but that the overall quality was better. All the Japanese first division teams are good and the quality is so evenly spread there are no easy games. There are no super-clubs, but there aren't any no-hopers, either. Compared with Holland, he seemed to be saying, Japan is flat!

> "They are the best-supported club in Japan, which helps make them the biggest earners"

You could view this as being very Japanese, everybody doing a good job and no one sticking out from the crowd.

But that was last year. Now it is time for a little mountain-building, and something is stirring in Saitama, the home of Reds. Their double triumph in J.League and Emperor's Cup last year may well have signalled the moment when Japan's first super-club saw the light of day.

Reds were the club who did everything wrong at first, at least on the field. They were founding members of the J.League and took that role seriously by propping up the table from the start. What they did have, however, was a fantastic group of supporters, hardened by adversity, who turned every match into an unforgettable spectacle. The atmosphere drew the players as well, such as a young Shinji Ono and, more recently, Keita Suzuki, Tulio Tanaka and Makoto Hasebe, and the results have finally come.

Big squad

What sets Reds apart is the size of their squad. Given the even spread of quality in the J.League, it was not surprising that Buchwald's side did not secure the championship until the final day, when they beat closest challengers Gamba Osaka 3-2.

Normally, the Emperor's Cup is something of a lottery because much of it is played after the League has finished, when many players are tired or injured. But despite having many players sidelined, Reds did win the Cup – again by defeating Gamba – for the second year running. No Japanese club have ever had such depth, the ability to so easily rotate players or bring in an adequate replacement for someone who is out of form.

Reds' growing financial pre-eminence was further demonstrated by the close-season signing of JEF United's versatile captain Yuki Abe, who offers further important options. His arrival means that Reds now have 12 players who have been capped by Japan – seven or eight of them are current regulars – and one, Washington, who has played for Brazil. Several others are in the national youth team set-up. An example of the strength in depth is the goalkeepers – Reds have two of international quality: Ryota Tsuzuki, who has been capped, and Norihiro Yamagishi, who hasn't but was recently called up to the Japan squad.

Diamonds are for ever...the Urawa squad salute their fans after retaining the Emperor's Cup by beating Gamba Osaka

The club are arguably the best supported in Japan, helping to make them the biggest earners – their income is nearly double the top-division average of £13m. And they have the country's largest football-specific stadium (the Yokohama stadium used for the World Cup Final is multi-purpose, with a running track).

Reds are, above all, ambitious, as shown by their co-operation deal with Bayern Munich and the reappointment as coach of Holger Osieck. The German, who succeeds his compatriot Buchwald, was recently head of FIFA's technical department.

These are further signs of Reds' determination to become a force in global football – and that's not necessarily unrealistic. The first of those Emperor's Cup victories gave Reds entry to this year's Asian Champions League, which, they are keenly aware, is also the route to FIFA's Club World Cup.

History is against them. Japan has had two clubs in the Champions League every year since its inception in 2002 and none has got beyond the group stage.

How can this be when the J.League is the strongest in Asia? Many explanations have been given, some saying Japan doesn't take Asian club football seriously enough, others that the failure is down to problems with scheduling.

Each new failure rankles, however, and there is no question that the Japanese are getting uptight about their poor results in the competition.

In reality, the squad size has almost certainly been the problem. The Japanese clubs simply haven't had the depth to win in Asia as well as at home. But Reds do now have the squad and also the intense desire to win.

Whether or not Reds win in Asia this year, we may now be at the beginning of something new. The J.League has changed again and the difference may be more qualitative this time.

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Reds, Antlers, Marinos, S-Pulse... a guide to the top division teams

1 ALBIREX NIIGATA
Play at Niigata's World Cup stadium and regularly draw crowds of 40,000, even though the team are undistinguished. Joined the League during the big expansion of 1999.

2 URAWA REDS
The Saitama-based club, last season's Double winners, have an average home attendance of over 40,000, by far the biggest income in Japan, a team stuffed with national team players and a burning ambition to become continental champions. Did not win their first silverware, the League Cup, until 2003.

3 OMIYA ARDIJA
Reds' poor neighbours have no big stars but made a brave showing in their first two years in the top flight and are due to move into a refurbished stadium in November. New Dutch coach Robert Verbeek is younger brother of former Ardija boss Pim Verbeek, now the South Korea boss.

4 KASHIMA ANTLERS
Giants of the J.League's early years but have not won the title since 2001. Antlers have strong Brazilian connections. Former players include Zico, Leonardo and Jorginho, and Brazilian coach Oswaldo Oliveira has just replaced compatriot Paulo Autuori.

5 KASHIWA REYSOL
Have bounced straight back to the top division. Made no big signings in the close season, so the club's most arresting sight will probably continue to be the small but hardy group of fans who strip to their underwear on even the coldest days as they cheer their team on.

6 VENTFORET KOFU
Surprisingly retained their top-flight status in their debut season last year. Kofu is a small city in the mountains, but the club have good local support.

7 FC TOKYO
Have many of Japan's best young defensive players, including Yasuyuki Konno and Teruyuki Moniwa, but the team have seriously underperformed for the past couple of years. The arrival of international midfielder Takashi Fukunishi and Costa Rican forward Paulo Wanchope offers hope of an improvement.

8 KAWASAKI FRONTALE
Finished second last year, despite having one of the lowest budgets. The style is not always pretty but they defend solidly and attack with great speed and flair. The club of computer and telecommunications corporation Fujitsu, a major employer in Kawasaki.

9 JEF UNITED
The Chiba-based club have a history of producing fine young internationals, from Shoji Jo in the 1990s to Yuki Abe and Koki Mizuno today. Attendances improved after the move to a new stadium last season but the budget is still modest. Ivica Osim's departure to coach the national team has left a hole that his replacement, his son Amar, may find hard to fill.

10 YOKOHAMA F MARINOS
Won consecutive championships under Takeshi Okada in 2003 and 2004 but have since lost their way. Hiroshi Hayano, who led Marinos to the title in 1995, has retaken the reins and made no fewer than 14 new signings – the biggest that of 2002 World Cup striker Takayuki Suzuki.

11 YOKOHAMA FC
Won the second division last year, having fought their way up the league pyramid. The club was created by fans 10 years ago, in the face of opposition from newly-formed Yokohama F Marinos, when Yokohama Flugels folded and merged with Yokohama Marinos.

12 SHIMIZU S-PULSE
Former S-Pulse striker Kenta Hasegawa has created a well-balanced squad and the team could be in the running for the title this season. Ex-Japan striker Akinori Nishizawa is the big new arrival.

13 JUBILO IWATA
Won three league titles between 1997 and 2002 but have not been the same since forced to rebuild the side. Iwata is a small city but Jubilo were still Japan's third highest earning club in 2005.

14 NAGOYA GRAMPUS EIGHT
One of the biggest clubs at the start of the J.League – think Gary Lineker and Arsene Wenger – but they have only ever won two Emperor's Cups, in 1995 and 1999. Dutch coach Sef Vergoossen has built a nicely balanced team featuring fine youngsters such as Keisuke Honda and veterans such as Keiji Tamada.

15 GAMBA OSAKA
Reds dethroned Gamba as champions last year and rubbed salt in the wound by also beating them in the Emperor's Cup Final. Defender Tsuneyasu Miyamoto has left for Salzburg but the attack has been boosted by the arrival of Brazilian Bare from Ventforet Kofu. Gamba have a delightful playing style.

16 VISSEL KOBE
Saved from the brink of bankruptcy in 2005 by internet firm Rakuten, went on to be relegated, but are now back in the top flight. Attendances are low and survival is the priority. The only big signing is striker Yoshito Okubo from relegated Cerezo Osaka.

17 SANFRECCE HIROSHIMA
Have proved their ability to survive with a low budget, mainly by growing their own talent – defender Yuichi Komano and striker Hisato Sato both played for Japan last year. Also renowned for their attractive style.

18 OITA TRINITA
Have fabulous fans, a World Cup stadium and look as if they're going places. Young Brazilian coach Pericles Chamusca says his goal is a top-six finish. The relegation of Avispa Fukuoka means Trinita are the only first division team on the island of Kyushu.

The movers and shakers in Japanese football

● MITSUNORI FUJIGUCHI
The former Mitsubishi and Japan player was a founding executive of Urawa Reds in the 1990s. He returned to the club in 2005 via executive positions at the J.League and FA, becoming president last June.

● YASUHARA SORIMACHI
Intelligent, personable coach who is assistant to national team boss Ivica Osim and leads the Olympic side in his own right. The 42-year-old began his coaching career at Albirex Niigata, leading them to the top flight in 2003.

● KENJI ONITAKE
Succeeded Masaru Suzuki as J.League chairman last July, stepping up from vice-chairman. Onitake coached the Osaka-based Yanmar club to three league and three cup triumphs in the pre-J.League era and went on to become president and chairman of Cerezo Osaka, who were formed out of Yanmar. The former businessman combines football expertise and vision with financial acumen.

● IVICA OSIM
The Bosnian took charge of the national team from Zico after last year's World Cup and has tried out many young players in his first few months. Knows the J.League well, having led JEF United to top-four finishes in three consecutive seasons, 2003 to 2005.

● MARCUS TULIO TANAKA
The Brazil-born Urawa Reds defender was J.League Player of the Year for 2006 and is a regular in the national team. Has Japanese grandparents and came to Japan as a schoolboy, acquiring nationality in 2003. His burly frame and speed going forward give club and country a new dimension.

● SABURO KAWABUCHI
The FA president is a former national team player and coach and was the first chairman of the J.League, doing a fine job in steering the domestic game towards stability after the boom and bust of its early years. Criticised in the media after Japan's poor showing at last year's World Cup because of his strong support of coach Zico, but he has maintained his authority.

● YUKI ABE
His move to Urawa Reds from JEF United was the big transfer story of the close season. Abe is the ultimate utility player, shining whether used in defence (his usual position with Japan) or defensive midfield. Also a dead-ball specialist. His arrival at Reds means they are even more heavily laden with international stars.

● KEITA SUZUKI
Stalwart in defensive midfield for Urawa Reds and Japan. Excellent at covering and tackling, and has fine distribution.

● TAKASHI SEKIZUKA
Coached low-budget Kawasaki Frontale to second place in the J.League last term, having led them to the second division title in 2004, his first year in charge.

● AKIRA NISHINO
The long-serving Gamba Osaka coach and former international won his spurs by leading Japan's Olympic team to victory over Brazil at the 1996 Games. Nishino then took charge of Kashiwa Reysol, winning the manager of the year award in 2000. Took over at Gamba in 2002 and led them to their first league title in 2005.

BACKGROUND BRIEFING

Marinos v Antlers in 2000

● The J.League was formed in 1993 with 10 teams from the Japan Soccer League. The remaining clubs in the JSL formed the semi-professional Japan Football League.

● The J.League expanded in 1999, taking in nine teams from the JFL to form two divisions, J1 and J2. J2 is to grow to 18 clubs from 13 by 2010 and 22 by 2016.

● The season runs from March to December. Until 2004 it was divided into two, with the champions from each half playing off to determine the overall winner. Jubilo Iwata and Yokohama F Marinos won both "halves" of the season in 2002 and 2003 respectively, making a play-off unnecessary. In 2005, the championship switched to a single league format.

● The Emperor's Cup is Japan's oldest competition, dating back to 1921. It is open to every member club of the JFA, from J.League sides down to teams from regional leagues and top college and high school sides. The Final normally takes place on New Year's Day, with the winner gaining a place in the following year's Asian Champions League.

More than a team

Brazil's 1970 World Cup-winning side are the most celebrated in the history of the game, but technical, tactical and training innovations were as important to their success as individual brilliance. By Tim Vickery

The party begins...Pele wheels away in delight after giving Brazil the lead in the Final

MORE THAN A football team, the Brazil 1970 side have become a myth. Consistently chosen as the best team ever, they are held up as the ultimate exponents of the beautiful game.

Sober judges might conclude that, man for man at least, Brazil's 1958 side was better. But the team that won in Mexico had one huge advantage – television. The 1970 World Cup was the first shown live in Brazil and many other places around the globe.

The 1970 team also benefited from evolution in other areas. Their individual brilliance was backed up by tactical ideas and methods of physical preparation that put them ahead of the field.

The mythology makes little space for such matters. The popular perception is of a group who swaggered off the beach to enchant the world with off-the-cuff samba soccer. In 1972 Danny Blanchflower wrote that "great teams don't need managers. Brazil won the World Cup in 1970 playing exhilarating football with a manager they'd had for three weeks. What influence can a man have who has only been with them for that length of time?"

In fact, Mario Zagallo had had two and a half months to coach the team, having taken over in the middle of March, and his predecessor, Joao Saldanha, had laid the groundwork. The colourful and charismatic Saldanha had shown the force of his personality from the day he was appointed in February 1969. The Brazil team had been dogged by regional rivalries, with journalists and directors from the various centres all pushing for the inclusion of their local heroes. But Saldanha put an instant stop to it all by immediately naming both his starting line-up and 11 reserves, and later that year his team cruised through World Cup qualification.

Saldanha was a very strange choice for the position, and not just because he had never been a player and was much more a journalist than a coach (though he had had a successful spell in charge of Botafogo a decade before). He was also vociferously on the political left at a time when Brazil's military dictatorship was at its most brutal.

The pressure on Saldanha's position brought out the worst of his volatile nature. When Flamengo coach Iustrich openly campaigned for his job, Saldanha responded

by invading Flamengo's hotel armed with a revolver. And, critically, he fell out with Pele. As a consequence of their dispute, Saldanha seemed on the verge of dropping Brazil's star player and spread rumours Pele had a problem with his vision.

Saldanha was sacked. Dino Sani, a midfielder at the 1958 finals, turned down the post, and Otto Gloria, who had taken Portugal to the 1966 semi-finals, was considered. But the job went to Zagallo, then just 38. In his first training session, he was approached by Pele, who said: "You can drop me, but don't play dirty with me." Zagallo responded that the team would be Pele and 10 others. And he made vital changes to the 10.

New era...Pele greets Zagallo on his appointment as Brazil coach

Running it...Rivelino revels in his left-sided role in the Final

Zagallo had made a successful start to his coaching career, and had an immaculate pedigree as a player, having made a key contribution to the 1958 and 1962 World Cup wins.

Strain on midfield

As a means of combating the extraordinary ability of strikers in the domestic game, Brazilian clubs had pioneered the use of a back four, adding an extra central defender to the usual three-man defence. The national team adopted the same tactic, but Zagallo was aware that the continuing use of two wingers put an enormous strain on the remaining midfield pair. Even during his playing days as a talented left winger, he had sacrificed his natural instincts by tracking back when Brazil lost possession. As a result, he created 4-3-3.

"I took over without a fixed idea of what I was going to do," Zagallo recalls, "but I knew there would be a lot of changes, because I didn't accept 4-2-4. There's no way we could have won the World Cup using that system."

Saldanha's side, with Edu on the left wing, had no place for Rivelino, who was reserve for Gerson in midfield. At first Zagallo also left him on the bench, instead bringing in Paulo Cesar, a wonderfully skilful winger who would also work back. The press attacked it as a defensive move, Paulo Cesar was singled out for criticism, struggled for form and in came Rivelino, who seized the chance he was offered as a false left winger.

Unhappy with his lumbering centre-backs, Zagallo pulled back Piazza from the holding midfield role to take one of the central defensive positions. It not only gave the coach more quality at the back but also created space for Clodoaldo to come into midfield.

The final piece of the jigsaw was slotted in up front. Although Tostao and Pele had played together under Saldanha, Zagallo initially thought they were too similar to work as a partnership. There was the added complication of Tostao's race for fitness after an eye operation.

The coach, who favoured a target man, tried out both Roberto Miranda and Dario. But, as Tostao recalls: "The style of Roberto or Dario was not right for that team. Pele, Gerson and Rivelino needed a player of movement, technique and quick thinking to combine with them. Zagallo saw this and decided to try me out, but without much conviction that it would work."

But it did, instantly, as Tostao stayed upfield as a reference point instead of taking his usual deep-lying role. The team was formed.

"We played as a block, compact," Zagallo says. "Jairzinho, Pele, Rivelino, all tracked back to join Gerson and Clodoaldo in midfield. I'm happy to see the team in terms of 4-5-1. We brought our team back behind the line of the ball. We didn't want to give space for the Europeans to hit us with quick counter-attacks.

"We preferred to defend in zones, to cover the space and not mark man-to-man. If we had gone with high-pressure marking, by the second half we would have run out of gas. So we saved our energy, dropped back, and then when we won possession the technical quality of the team stood out."

Naive Italy

Zagallo's experiments had taken him to the utopia of the coach – a balance between attack and defence. Final opponents Italy looked astonishingly naive in comparison. Defending on top of their keeper they left themselves stretched, forcing their midfielders to cover huge distances and leaving acres of space in which Gerson could pull the strings.

But Brazil's advantage was not only technical and tactical, it was also physical. The 1970 World Cup was a triumph for the Brazilian concept of a technical commission, a group of specialists working together.

As far back as 1958 Brazil were experimenting with scientific methods in their preparation for games. By 1970, under Admildo Chirol, Brazil had assembled a group of physical preparation staff that included two future national team coaches – Claudio Coutinho and Carlos Alberto Parreira. Schedules were developed to cater to the individual needs of each player.

Zagallo says: "We had trained for 21 days at altitude [in Mexico] and knew scientifically, this would stay in the organism of the players. We then went down to Guadalajara, where we played all our games until the Final [in Mexico City, 650 metres higher] – but we knew that altitude preparation was still inside them. No one else had done it. Our physical preparation was excellent – we won most games in the second half."

"We were so well prepared," adds Rivelino. "Even playing in that heat I don't remember once having to go over to the touchline to drink water."

Instead, Rivelino, who would not have been in the team had Zagallo not taken over, has been able to drink from the cup of glory ever since, and toast the moment technique, tactics and training came together to make magic. ●

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WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Brazil's 1970 World Cup-winning team

1 Carlos Alberto
Has been coaching, most recently Azerbaijan. Also served as a local councillor.

2 Brito
Enjoys the quiet life in Rio de Janeiro, doing lots of fishing.

3 Gerson
Does media work and his charity Instituto Canhotinho de Ouro (golden left foot) provides sports, medical and educational facilities for children.

4 Piazza
Has owned petrol stations, was briefly a local politician and is a leader of the players' union in Belo Horizonte.

5 Everaldo
Died in a car crash in 1974.

6 Tostao
Trained and worked as a doctor but was tempted back to football to do media work in 1994, and is now Brazil's most authoritative football columnist.

7 Clodoaldo
Owns an estate agency and is director of Santos, his long-time club as a player.

8 Rivelino
Was briefly a coach, even more briefly a director of Corinthians, and has also done media work. Has a football school in Sao Paulo.

9 Pele
Travels constantly promoting his commercial sponsors. The occasional scandal never seems to affect his image.

10 Jairzinho
Has coached (most recently Gabon), talent-spotted and dined out a lot on scoring in every game in 1970.

11 Felix
Has sold fridges and cars, given lectures and co-ordinated municipal football schools.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

JULY

1970

How we reported the 1970 World Cup Final

MEXICO CITY – WORLD CUP FINAL 1970 – BRAZIL version ITALY

BRAZIL—CAMPEON DEL MUNDO

Champions of the World

THOSE lucky enough to be present in the Azteca stadium during the afternoon of June 21 will never forget the scenes of emotion and jubilation they witnessed after Brazil had beaten Italy 4-1. Around the world, too, in front of television sets, hundreds of millions joined in the applause for a superb climax to the 1970 World Cup finals.

It was not simply a magnificent and thoroughly deserved triumph for Brazil. Here was proof that football, played the way it was meant to be, with artistry and skill, can still succeed in the modern era.

From their first match against Czechoslovakia, the Brazilians showed that they had fully recaptured the magic they had lost four years ago. Pele proved his genius lives on, and around him buzzed colleagues with finesse and enthusiasm that was poetry in motion.

Brazil ultimately won the Final itself with goals to spare yet during an absorbing first half the Italians never looked out of their class. Their tight marking and tremendous depth in defence left Brazil with little room in which to work. But Brazil can only be contained for so long. In the earlier matches the opportunism of Pele, Jairzinho, Tostao and Rivelino proved decisive but in the semi-final and Final the midfield duo of Clodoaldo and Gerson scored vital goals. Perhaps this is the secret; almost anyone is capable of being a match-winner.

Brazil were put on the road to victory by a splendid goal by Pele in the 18th minute. Tostao's throw-in from the left was lobbed high into the middle by Rivelino, and Pele soared like an eagle to head past a helpless Albertosi.

Until this point, and for some time after, too, Brazil's most consistent attacking force had been skipper Carlos Alberto. Jairzinho spent most of the opening period away from the right flank, taking Facchetti with him, leaving a clear avenue for Carlos Alberto to exploit.

Brazil carelessly gave away an equaliser in the 37th minute, and again it was their habit of playing short, square passes across the back that cost them dearly.

Clodoaldo, trying a piece of ball-jugglery that was never on, was dispossessed by Boninsegna. Felix advanced from his goal and was a little unlucky to see the ball rebound off a couple of players, leaving Boninsegna with an open goal.

Despite this lapse, and the fact that the teams were level at the interval, one could never envisage Italy winning. Brazil were not fully into their stride and it was not until Gerson put them ahead that they hit a superlative peak.

The second half was 20 minutes old when Jairzinho's raid was halted but Gerson, who had a fine match, gained possession and sent a marvellous shot to the left of Albertosi.

From this moment on the Italian marking, not surprisingly, became relatively slack and Jairzinho came more into his own. He was obviously determined to maintain his record of having scored in every match in Mexico.

He kept that record intact in the 70th minute. Everaldo pushed a short free-kick to Gerson, who, from almost the halfway line, floated a high, diagonal ball to Pele – a frequent tactic – and the great man headed down into the path of Jairzinho, who scored with delightful relish.

Teams other than Brazil might have been content to rest on a two-goal lead but not the world champions. Again Pele was the key man, laying the ball off for Carlos Alberto to hammer an unstoppable shot across Albertosi. It was a fitting reward for the Brazilian captain.

Kachkar faces the curse of Marseille

Marseille for me...but Jack Kachkar's proposed buyout at the Velodrome is by no means a done deal

Can OM's prospective owner end trophy jinx?

OLYMPIQUE MARSEILLE share, with Schalke and Newcastle, the painful fate of a club more about adulation than achievement: fanatical supporters, no end of potential wealthy backers – and nothing like the success they all believe they deserve.

The French club have tottered from one controversial patron to another. First came Marcel Leclerc, then the flamboyant Bernard Tapie (whose legal battles from that era still crawl on), then Robert Louis-Dreyfus, the one-time Adidas boss. The latest Don Quixote tilting at the windmill is Canadian businessman Jack Kachkar.

His proposed purchase is also suffering from the apparent "curse of OM", with one delay following another. But Kachkar does not appear to have used that time to ponder why Louis-Dreyfus, steeped in European sports commerce, should have failed.

Of course, the man usually known as RLD had himself to blame: allowing himself to be simultaneously distracted by his interest in Standard Liege left him at the mercy of officials whose under-the-counter transfer dealings in the late 1990s landed him with a three-year suspended sentence and £250,000 fine last June. Long before then it was clear that RLD, massively disillusioned after a 10-year rollercoaster ride, wanted out.

In early January, Kachkar offered £80million for the club and made various other promises to cover Louis-Dreyfus's guarantees. Originally, RLD had bought Marseille, on the brink of bankruptcy, for a symbolic one franc but it is reckoned he invested £120m of his own money in the club – a hefty price to pay for a legal kick in the teeth.

> "The last thing the French game needs is another mystery man with obscure objectives"

Marseille won nothing on RLD's watch. They did reach the UEFA Cup Final in 2004 but lost to Valencia.

Now Kachkar (his Armenian family name is Kachkarian) is buying into the dream for reasons beyond comprehension. He was born in Syria, emigrated to Canada in 1969 and graduated from the University of Alberta in Edmonton before obtaining a medical degree in Hungary. In due course he rose to become chief executive of his own pharmaceuticals company, Inyx.

His acquisition of Marseille has been delayed most recently by an investigation into the source of his purchase funds undertaken by Tracfin, the finance ministry's policing body, at the request of RLD's bankers.

This does not signify any suggestion of impropriety, merely curiosity. But it is curiosity at a very high level, emitted by both interior minister Nicolas Sarkozy and the office of prime minister Dominique de Villepin. That underlines the importance of OM within French sporting culture.

One hitch was the fact that one of Kachkar's former associates, Alexandre Benkovitch – also the former husband of his wife – was linked in the mid-1990s to dubious financial dealings with a Russian mafioso, Semion Yukovich Mokilevitch. A joint investigation into alleged money-laundering was undertaken by revenue officials in both France and the United States but no charges were brought against Kachkar or Benkovitch.

Yet Marseille might end the season not only with a new owner but also a first trophy since the tarnished European Cup of 1993. While negotiations dragged on, Marseille cruised into the French Cup semi-finals with a 5-0 thrashing of third division Vannes.

It was a timely encouragement for Kachkar, who has been described as coming out of the same stable as Milan Mandaric, the Serb/Canadian who financed Portsmouth's revival and now wants to repeat the trick with Leicester City. But at least Mandaric had a track record in the football business. Kachkar does not compare, and that has the French federation worried. The last thing their corruption-embedded game needs is another mystery man with obscure objectives.

That also applies to G-14, of which Marseille remain members. Fourteen trophy-free years is not a good advert for the self-styled group of elite clubs, is it? ●

OTHER MATTERS ARISING...

Eyes on the ball...Blatter with Gordon Brown

Blatter keeps his options open

Shock, horror! Sepp Blatter is not as big a fan of England's embryonic bid to host the 2018 World Cup as the London media assumed.

Of course not. He is, after all, FIFA president and should not be seen to be biased (never mind his leanings towards South Africa for 2006 then 2010, never mind his more-than-tacit support for Michel Platini in the UEFA presidential election).

Blatter is standing for re-election at the end of May. He is apparently unassailable, omnipotent, beyond challenge. However, there is no point in antagonising voting member associations in the Americas and Asia.

Hence his insistence on keeping secret the 2018 selection system until the due decision date in November. A strategy of keeping options open as long as possible has served Blatter well in his FIFA career thus far; there is no need to change now just to assist the populist profile of Gordon Brown, Britain's chancellor of the exchequer.

After all, even assuming Brown does become prime minister later this year he will have gone by the time of the 2018 finals. But do not bet against Blatter not being still around. After all, he would be only 82 – quite serviceable for a FIFA president.

Wenger's French example

It was blindingly obvious where Arsene Wenger was coming from when he demanded an end to FA Cup replays: France. In the wake of Arsenal's dour goalless draw at home to Blackburn in the fifth round, Wenger suggested deciding the outcome on the day – with extra-time and penalties if necessary.

No surprise there then, because that is the system in his native country. So, mere Gallic logic? Well, not entirely. I notice Wenger did not propose importing one other feature of the French system – that the higher-placed club always play away.

But Wenger has shown his ability to keep everyone guessing when it comes to the issue of rotation. He used his kids for the League Cup Final then rested some of them for the FA Cup replay against Blackburn, a 1-0 defeat. Will the real Arsenal first team please stand up (if you know who you are).

Yes, the future looks terrific for the Gunners but I can name a string of clubs about whom that was said (whatever happened, for example, to Crystal Palace, the "team of the Eighties"?).

Technological trickery

We are no nearer seeing technological aids for referees. In fact, that day is probably further away than ever, despite the spin that followed the International Board's annual meeting in Manchester.

The Board set down four essential principles:

1) The technology must apply only to goal-line technology.
2) The system must be 100 per cent accurate.
3) The electronic indication to the referee about whether or not the ball has crossed the line must be instantaneous.
4) The signal is communicated only to match officials.

But two years ago the Board set up trials at the World Youth Cup (which took place) and the Club World Cup (which did not) with the prospect of using technology at last year's World Cup, something that, of course, did not happen.

This time the only official talk was of an informal roll-out for the Adidas/Cairos microchip ball at FIFA HQ in Zurich in April. But that is not the only system around. Hawk-Eye, the company already up front in tennis and cricket, is hoping to trial a line-check system of its own at academy level "within weeks".

Keith Hackett, the English Premier League referees' chief, is a supporter of the Hawk-Eye project. He is confident that a refined system to decide the sort of issues raised by Pedro Mendes's "goal" for Tottenham at Manchester United two years ago will be available "sooner rather than later".

FA chief executive Brian Barwick was upbeat about the progress made. He said: "We have laid down the principles for the introduction of goal-line technology because there is a general consensus that this is the time to move forward. What is critical is getting the system 100 per cent right, not the time factor."

Other Board decisions were:

1) Pitchside monitors must not be visible from technical areas.
2) No advertising within the technical area.
3) T-shirt and undershorts must be the same colour as the main kit.
4) Kit must not carry religious or personal statements.
5) Face-masks are banned from goal celebrations.

Damn lies and stats

Coaches won't let the facts get in the way of a good theory

LET ME TELL you about a couple of clinics I attended recently, both given by experienced coaches.

The first was a demonstration, using young players, on the supposed merits of the early cross. The kids went through the routine 20 times. One goal was scored. One out of 20 means five per cent – but the coach was telling us that, at the World Cup in Germany, 20 per cent of the goals were scored from crosses, most of them of the early variety.

Should we listen to these guys? Later, I checked the "How the goals were scored" section in FIFA's World Cup technical analysis report. They don't have a separate section for crossing, so presumably "wing play" covers that aspect. We get: total number of goals scored 147; from wing play 20 – which equals 13.6 per cent. And the real figure is obviously lower, because not all of those crosses (even if they were all crosses) would have been early.

I can't argue with the coach's theory that the early cross catches defenders running towards their own goal, gives them a difficult ball to deal with, and raises the danger of an own goal. But the practice, as so often in football, simply doesn't comply.

A day later, I listened to the other coach, who was also talking about scoring. He projected a slide and lots of words to read, the last line of which leaped to my attention: "40 per cent of goals are scored from set-plays" – not just in the World Cup, but everywhere. I knew that wasn't true, but to be on the safe side I again looked at the FIFA report: 46 of the 147 goals came from set-pieces, in other words, 31.3 per cent.

So here I've caught two coaches distorting the reality of what goes on on the field.

Why would they do that? Could it be that they were first choosing their topic and then altering the facts of the game to fit in with their theories? You bet it could.

There used to be a debating-society joke about that, how the only honest way to begin any speech was: "These, gentlemen, are the opinions on which I shall base my facts."

Obviously, the joke lives on in coaching circles, and for a reason. It is, in fact, a rather splendid measure of the extent to which the theory of coaching is undermining the reality of the game itself.

The early-crosses clinic was well organised and full of action – it was entertaining. Had I not kept notes, I might well have lost sight of the fact that it totally failed to demonstrate the idea on which it was predicated.

No matter – the staging of the clinic was the important thing, more important than its veracity. Same thing with the set-plays. Coaches are always quick to emphasise their importance – because most coaches are pure and simple organisers, they want to see patterns, they want to see role-playing, they want order on the field. Their order, of course.

The set-piece is something he can be involved in, something that can be practised. No wonder he's keen to inflate its importance. Indeed, there is a sense in which all of the thousands of clinics given by coaches are nothing more than lessons in set-pieces.

The more successful ones will be about defence, of course. Defence is eminently organisable. Attacking play is a problem because coaches know perfectly well that an organised attack is an oxymoron. Unpredictability, sudden surprise moves are surely the essence of good attacking play.

That is an awkward fact for the clinicians. But what if they tell us that set-pieces account for 40 per cent of goals and early crosses for another 20 per cent – then they've got almost two-thirds of scoring tied up by things they can turn into clinics.

There is an absurd side to this. I recall an article describing an elaborate set-play to be used to score a goal from the kick-off. The fact that it could be used only once per game – or that you had to give up a goal to use it again, was not mentioned. The set-play was the thing, an end in itself, it was something the coach could programme.

But this clinic-giving, this set-play approach to the game, is an insidious menace to the skilled player. Of what use is he when he can't be relied on to stick to his allotted role in set-pieces, when he might delay a cross or two?

Thus the world of the clinics: to fashion a sport in which the coach calls all the shots. It's a pity that scoring and entertainment value continue to shrivel up. ●

Illustration by Dave Semple

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Priced out of the game

Spiralling ticket costs mean a whole generation of fans cannot afford to watch top-flight football in England

WHEN THE PRIME MINISTER suddenly says, in a carefully prepared soundbite, that ticket prices in the English Premier League are too high and that there are now empty spaces in grounds, it is a sign that the campaign against "rip-off football" is reaching what politicians call a tipping point.

It has taken a long time – since the Premier League was formed in 1992, there have been continual price hikes, which have taken attendance at top-flight football matches from an activity shared by people of just about any income and any age to one reserved predominantly for the solidly-earning middle-aged. Tony Blair said the empty seats meant there were "sound, market-based reasons" for clubs to lower their prices. The moral argument, preferred by many fans, is that prices are outrageously, disgustingly, exploitatively too high.

Of course, before the Premier League some grounds were dilapidated and often only half-full, but it cost very little to go along. I have a battered, photocopied page from the old Football Trust's annual report that lists average admission prices at all clubs for the 1989-90 season. Then, as now, Chelsea was the most expensive, but it wasn't £60 to get in, only an average of £7.30. At Arsenal, where today's top price is £94, the average was £6.71. The northern clubs were always cheaper: it cost an average £4.71 to watch Manchester United's home games; across Manchester, City's price was the cheapest in the top division, £3.94.

These, remember, are averages. The lowest price, for thousands to stand on the great terraces, the North Bank, Stretford End or Kippax, to watch the nation's top clubs, was only £2 or £3.

The vast majority of people, including young people, became football supporters without having to worry about the cost. Cheap prices built English football as the great, passionately-supported "people's game".

The majority of the 96 who died at Hillsborough in April 1989 were young because it was cheap to buy a ticket for the horrible Leppings Lane terrace at Sheffield Wednesday's scandalously unsafe ground. Liverpool-supporting families lost sons and daughters mostly, not parents.

When Lord Justice Taylor inspected the English game, he recommended all-seater stadiums, but also argued that club directors should run the game "in the interests of their grassroots supporters". The Football Supporters Association lobbied against all-seater grounds, arguing that clubs would inevitably raise prices, and Taylor listened, saying in his report clubs should not. He cited the £6 to get into Ibrox as a reasonable price.

The clubs slapped their applications in for grants of public money, which Taylor also recommended should be made available to help rebuild the grounds, but none paid any heed to his call for prices to stay affordable. There was, instead, a shameless dash to raise them, fuelled by the rejuvenation of the game's image after Italia 90.

In 1992 came the Premier League breakaway and the first TV deal with Rupert Murdoch's BSkyB, worth £305million. Enlightened clubs now – which also, coincidentally, happen to be those with empty spaces in their stands, such as Blackburn and Bolton – argue the next deal, from 2007-10 and worth £2.7billion, should subsidise ticket prices. That could have happened from the beginning if clubs hadn't fallen over themselves to exploit the fans' loyalty.

As far as most clubs could see, it did them no harm. The grounds were developed beyond recognition, top foreign players were signed, the media were positive and fans poured back.

One of the mysteries was how people have afforded price increases touching 800 per cent; one explanation lies in the fact that the average age of the Premier League fan has risen to 42 – the people who can afford to attend tend to be older. All clubs do deals for children, but most charge full price for everyone above 16. So a generation has been priced out.

Now, even the balding, misty-eyed 40-to-50-year-old obsessives are discovering the ability to say no to the game they love. It is not happening everywhere – Manchester United expanded Old Trafford to hold 76,000 this season and have sold out; Arsenal have also enjoyed full houses at the new 60,000-seat Emirates stadium. But at Manchester City, season ticket sales are down 20 per cent on 2003-04, and Blackburn, Bolton, Wigan and Middlesbrough fans are beginning to choose their matches.

After years of fans' groups protesting against rip-off prices, the issue has suddenly become mainstream. *The Sun*, a Murdoch newspaper, surprisingly mounted a campaign for cheaper prices, and just a few weeks later there was the prime minister having his say. You might wonder if Blair had been listening not to ordinary fans but to Murdoch, his long-term supporter, who, after paying all that money for TV rights does not want to show matches played in front of empty seats.

That, though, could be being far too cynical; maybe, after 10 years in power and saying and doing nothing about it, the prime minister has just discovered it has become outrageously expensive to watch football. ●

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Hotting up...Sparta fans get in the mood by setting off a flare

Magic of Derby 'S'

Sparta and Slavia meet for the 265th time on April 21. Peterjon Cresswell reviews the story so far of football in the Czech capital

THERE IS A GOOD chance that this year, for the first time in four seasons, the two great rivals of Czech football will face each other in spring neck-and-neck for the championship. They were just two points apart at the winter break, and when record title-winners Sparta and long-time underdogs Slavia clash at Sparta's Toyota Arena on April 21, each will surely still have a chance of wresting the title from the holders, provincial club Slovan Liberec.

As always, Sparta are favourites to win at the Letna, the traditional name for their home ground, which is also the national stadium, but their rivals are certainly due a victory.

Slavia have not won the title since 1996, the memorable triumph coming a century after their rivalry with Sparta had begun. The clubs met for the first time on March 29, 1896, in a 0-0 draw at the Emperor's Meadow in front of 121 paying spectators.

Four days earlier, Slavia had first worn their red-and-white halved shirts, with the red five-pointed star badge, a symbol of Czech nationalism. Prague was part of the Habsburg empire at the time, ruled from Vienna; Slavia was the name of a Czech-language society of literature, sport and debate.

Sparta enjoyed a large working-class support. The team were renowned for fighting until the final minute, earning themselves the nickname *zelezna* – Iron Sparta.

So the games between these two clubs, the Derby 'S', started to take on extra significance. Slavia dominated the early exchanges and thrashed their rivals 9-1 in 1907 and 9-2 four years later. But Sparta fought back, recording gritty wins in 1913 and 1914.

Until the Second World War, the clubs monopolised the championship. They also both won the Mitropa Cup, a forerunner of the European Cup, and provided the bulk of the Czechoslovak team that nearly won the 1934 World Cup.

The Prague football scene was entertaining and colourful. The football fraternity discussed the game in the cigarette smoke of the Cafe Slavia, and on the pitch, players were not afraid to try unusual moves, using tricks learned in street football.

But for Slavia the good times came to an end in 1947 when they won their 13th title, with legendary Pepi Bican leading the line. The following year came the Communist takeover, when sport was another area of Czech life to be restructured. Sparta's support earned them the favour of the authorities, but the leadership viewed the troublesome university-educated intellectuals of Slavia with suspicion. The club were stripped of their name, their star players and the 1948 autumn title, something still disputed to this day.

New force

Slavia, rebranded Sokol Praha 7 then Dynamo, suffered the ignominy of second division football after half the squad went to newly-formed army side, ATK, later renamed Dukla, the new force in the Czech game.

Dukla carried the flag for football-proud Prague into the televised era of European competition. Sparta changed acronyms – TJ CKD, AC – but always remained Sparta, and picked up the odd title.

Slavia later got back their name and top-flight status, even getting the better of the Derby 'S' in the 1970s. Slavia players honoured the 1989 student demonstrations against the Communist regime with a pre-match show of support.

The changes to a free-market economy after the Communist collapse led the army to withdraw their support from Dukla in 1994. The club, for ever linked to the hated former regime, were hurtling towards bankruptcy and playing in front of three-figure crowds. Then, in 1996, they were merged with second division FC Pribram by entrepreneur Bohumir Duricko. The new entity, Marila Pribram, based 60km south-west of Prague, are currently fighting a relegation battle in the top flight.

Bohemians, another Prague club, have had a similarly turbulent existence since the war. Despite their proletarian roots, they were not favoured by the

Proud in the colours...Ales Urbanek in Slavia's traditional red and white strip

SURVIVAL GUIDE

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● ARRIVAL & TRANSPORT

Prague airport, Ruzyne (pictured left), is 20km north-west of the centre, served by a CEDAZ bus to Dejvicka and Namesti Republiky metro stations. A taxi should cost about 500 crowns (Kc) (£12); agree a price beforehand.

The city has a three-line metro network and a plethora of trams and buses. Complicated machines offer short-hop single (14Kc; 35p) and one-ride multi-transfer (20Kc; 50p) tickets as well as passes. The centre is walkable, however.

● HOTELS

Although designer hotels now abound, there are still plenty of cheap options.

You can book accommodation with the Prague Information Service (Old Town Hall, Staromestske namesti; +420 221 714 444; www.pis.cz) online or in person.

Hotel Yasmin (pictured second top) (Politickych veznu 12; +420 234 100 100; www.hotel-yasmin.cz), near Wenceslas Square, is the latest in the designer genre.

Grand Hotel Evropa (Vaclavske namesti 25; +420 224 228 215; www.evropahotel.cz), on Wenceslas Square, is certainly grand on the outside but modest on the inside, hence the mid-range prices for something so central.

The tranquil Hotel Villa Schwaiger (Schwaigerova 3; +420 233 320 271; www.villaschwaiger.cz) is handy for the Toyota Arena.

● EATING & DRINKING

Czech food is traditionally heavy and unadventurous. Pork and dumplings are served at dozens of cheap neighbourhood eateries, where the kitchen tends to have closed by 9pm. Typical of the genre are U Medvidku (Na perstyne 7) and U Radnice (U Radnice 2). For a more modern take on Czech cuisine, try Celnice (V Celnici 4) or Zahrada v opere (Legerova 75).

Czech beer is cheap and arguably the best in the world. Brews such as Budweiser, Staropramen and Pilsner Urquell can be enjoyed at a traditional beerhall, such as the famous, tourist-swamped U Fleku (Kremencova 11), or at the many modern venues – Zelezne dvere (Kremencova 10) and Ultramarin (Ostrovni 32) are as good as any and livelier than most.

● DAYTIME ENTERTAINMENT

The key sight is Prague Castle (middle picture), where you'll find St Vitus Cathedral. Old Town Square is the site of the Church of Our Lady before Tyn, the Old Town Hall and the Astronomical Clock. Charles Bridge is a short walk away.

● AFTER DARK

Prague is party city. Mainstay clubs Roxy (Dlouha 33) and Radost FX (Belehradska 120) face competition at the weekend from Mecca (U pruhonu) in Holesovice, Klub Lavka (Novotneho lavka 1) and Duplex (Vaclavske namesti 21).

Communist authorities and, like Slavia, were forced to change their name, first to Zeleznicar then Spartak Stalingrad. They became Bohemians again in the 1970s and enjoyed their best period in the Eighties. The club were then relegated and nearly went out of business in 2005, only to be saved by fans' donations. Club president is Antonin Panenka, hero of Czechoslovakia's penalty shoot-out win in the Euro 76 Final.

Entrepreneurs dominated the Czech game in the 1990s. Millionaire Vratislav Cekan spent a fortune rescuing Viktoria Zizkov, the club of the working-class Prague 3 district who are currently in the second division. The Rezes family, owners of the Kosice steelworks in Slovakia, threw enough money at debt-ridden Sparta to keep them atop the League and competing in the Champions League. Czech-American Boris Korbel took over Slavia but had left by the time Karel Poborsky, Radek Bejbl and Vladimir Smicer led the club to the 1996 title, their first for 50 years.

As Slavia's pre-war goalkeeping hero Frantisek Planicka lay dying in bed, the club triumphed on an emotional May afternoon. A month later, the same three players helped take the national team to the Euro 96 Final, marking a real revival in the country's football.

After that, Slavia sold their stars and have failed to match Sparta since – but the derby always holds its magic and the rivalry is as historic as any in the European game. In October, there were six yellow cards and one red in a feisty 0-0 draw at Slavia's temporary home, the Evzen Rosicky stadium. Next year will see the first derby at Slavia's revamped Eden stadium. Last season's meeting at the Letna attracted a crowd of 20,300, the highest since 1993. The game at Sparta in April will be the 265th derby in all. ●

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What it's all about...Slavia on the attack in the derby

THE STADIUMS

Top: the Toyota Arena. Left: Bohemians' Dolicek stadium. Right: the Viktoria stadium in Zizkov

LETNA BE LOVE

THE TOYOTA ARENA, known by all as the Letna after the parkland in which it is set, is the home of Sparta Prague and the national team. The ground, a compact, 20,000-capacity all-seater, became a political hot potato last May when prime minister Jiri Paroubek made a pre-election pledge to build a 35,000-capacity national stadium on the site. Although the idea has since lost momentum, the FA is still looking for Sparta to vacate the ground by 2008.

The stadium lies just over the Vltava river, north of the city centre, on the Milady Horakove main road. The nearest metro station is Hradcanska, on green line A.

Tickets for Sparta games (60Kc-230Kc; £1.50-£5.50) go on sale two days in advance at the club's customer centre (+420 296 111 400/zcentrum@sparta.cz), next to the stadium's entrance 1. Office hours are 9am-noon and 1pm-5.30pm on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, until 7pm on Wednesday and until 4pm on Friday. On weekend matchdays, the office opens three hours before kick-off.

Sparta fans gather at the south end of the ground, the Milady Horakove end, which is accessible through entrance 1. Visiting supporters sit in the north end, via entrance 4. Neutrals are most comfortably positioned along the east side, via entrances 2 and 3.

Souvenirs, including traditional Czech football horns, are sold at the club shop on the corner of Milady Horakove and U Sparty. Stadium tours (20Kc-30Kc; 50p-75p; in Czech only) take place on weekdays, 10am-noon, 1pm-4pm, except on matchdays and the day before European games.

While Slavia's Eden ground in Vrsovice is being reconstructed they are playing at the Evzen Rozicky stadium, beside the massive Strahov stadium in the north-west of the city.

Second division leaders Viktoria Zizkov are based in the working-class district of Zizkov, a short tram ride south of Prague's main railway station, Hlavni nadrazi.

Bohemians, mid-table in the second division, play at the modest Dolicek stadium in Vrsovice, a short tram ride from either the IP Pavlova or Namesti Miru metro stations.

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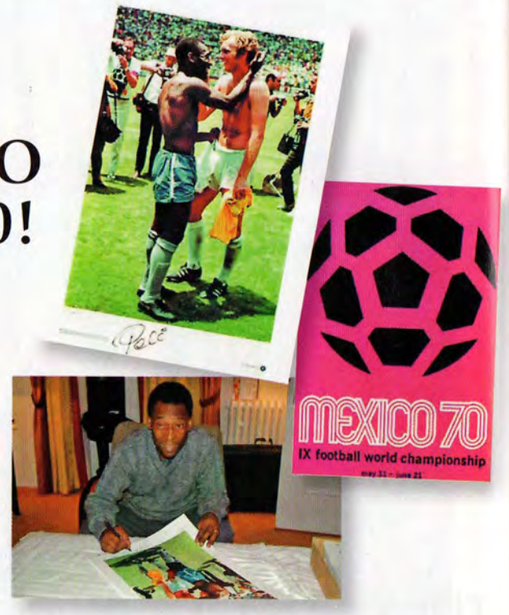

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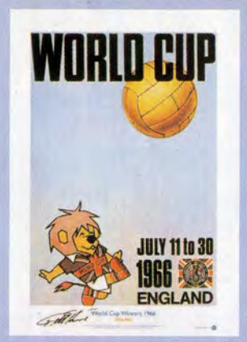

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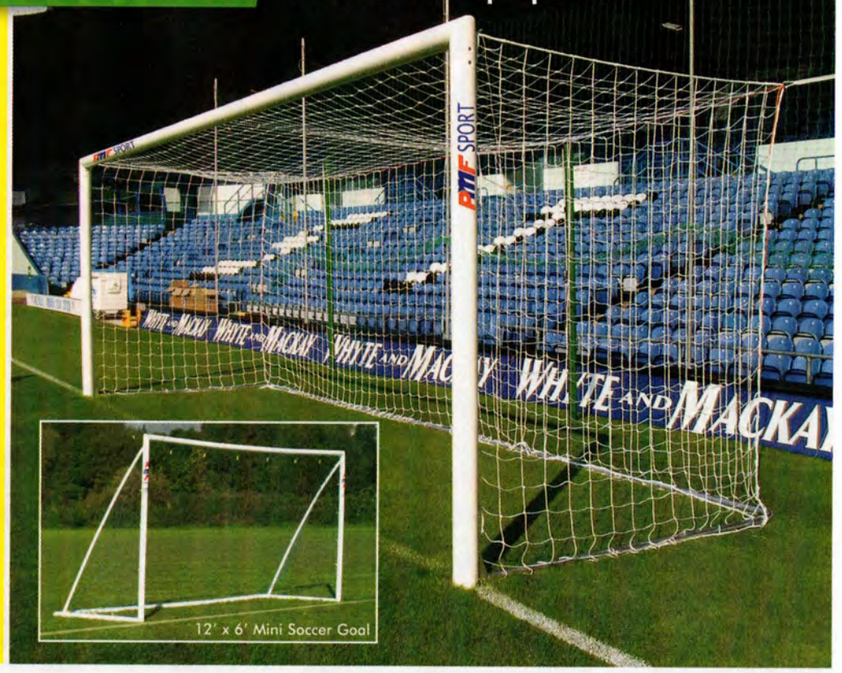

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NEW!

We're going through...PSV Eindhoven's Alex celebrates his goal against Arsenal that put his side into the Champions League quarter-finals

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Up for grabs

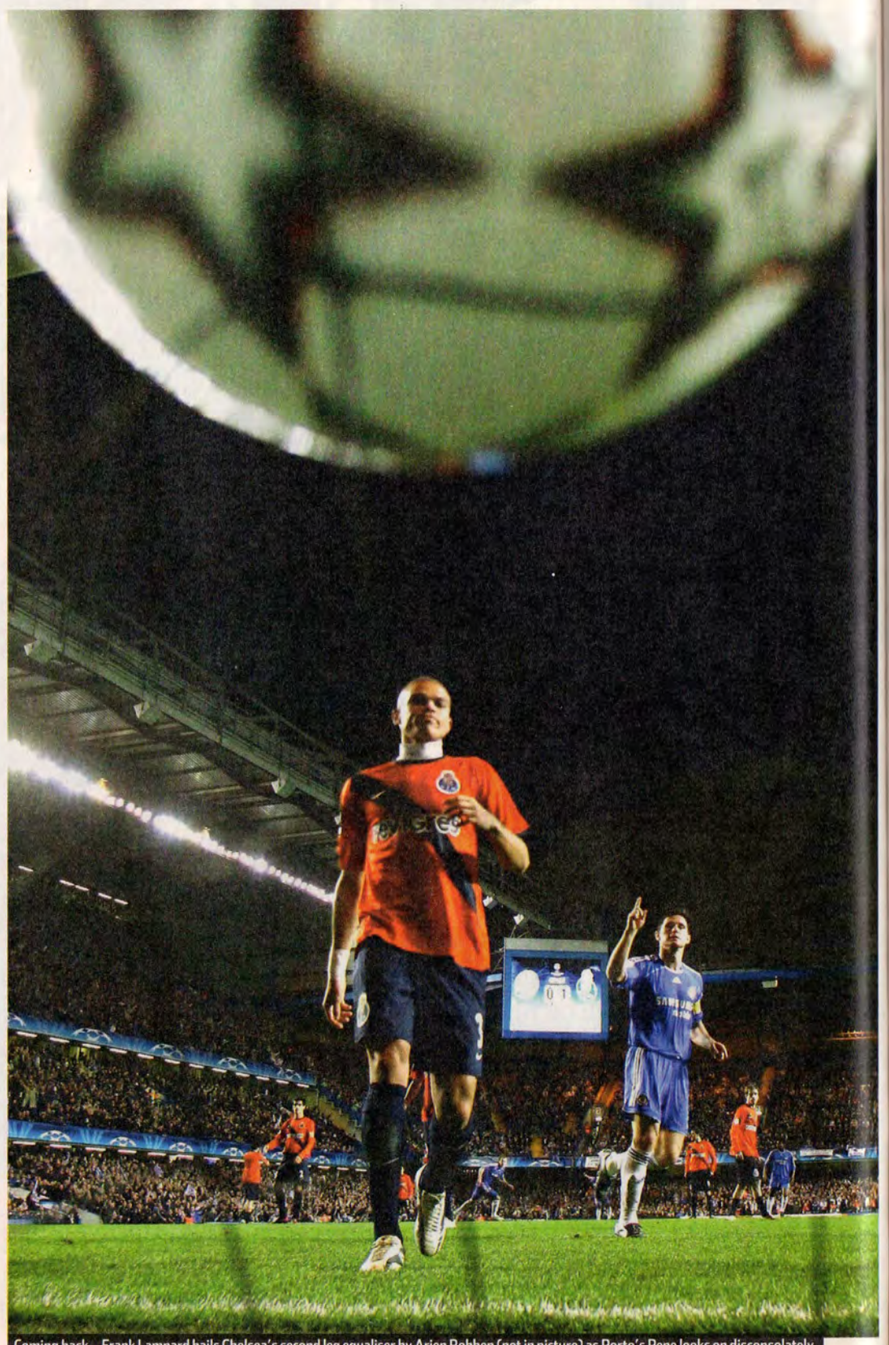
THE EIGHT remaining teams in the Champions League all harbour realistic hopes of triumphing in the Final in Athens on May 23 after a number of leading contenders were eliminated in the first knockout round.

Last year's finalists, Barcelona and Arsenal, both exited, as did Internazionale and Lyon, the runaway leaders of the Italian and French leagues respectively. Nine-times winners Real Madrid, beaten on away goals by Bayern Munich, were left to contemplate another unsuccessful European campaign.

Madrid and Bayern shared eight goals over an enthralling 180 minutes, but goals were few and far between in the other ties, many of which were overshadowed by arguments and controversy.

Valencia and Inter faced stiff punishment from UEFA because of the astonishing brawl that followed the Spanish side's away-goals victory. Lille were also likely to be disciplined after their players threatened a walk-off in their home leg against Manchester United.

Brawling...Valencia v Inter



Coming back...Frank Lampard hails Chelsea's second leg equaliser by Arjen Robben (not in picture) as Porto's Pepe looks on disconsolately

Kaka kills Celtic challenge

An extra-time goal from Kaka ensured victory for Milan over a battling Celtic side who had contained the Italians throughout the first leg in Glasgow and 90 minutes of the return.

Milan, who were unable to field Ronaldo (cup-tied) and Filippo Inzaghi (injured), had returned frustrated from a vibrant Celtic Park after being held goalless. They found the second leg equally challenging, with Celtic players working furiously to maintain their shape and keep Milan's attacking efforts to a minimum.

Both sides had strong penalty appeals rejected at the San Siro, Celtic claiming Paolo Maldini had handled Jiri Jarosik's shot, Milan objecting to Lee Naylor's tug on the shirt of the now fit Inzaghi. The tie was settled by Kaka's brilliant run and shot three minutes into the extra period.

Valencia and Inter face UEFA wrath

Valencia's victory over Inter on away goals was overshadowed by incredible scenes at the final whistle of the second leg in Spain as the home players celebrated. Simmering Inter resentment about the defeat boiled over, with Argentina midfielder Nicolas Burdisso having to be restrained by his team-mates. Unused Valencia substitute David Navarro then ran on to the field to attack Burdisso, breaking his nose with a right hook. Navarro was then chased around the pitch by Inter players, Ivan Cordoba eventually catching him and trying to wrestle him to the ground. The Valencia man escaped and made it to the dressing room, only for Inter players, led by Esteban Cambiasso, to force their way inside to continue the fight.

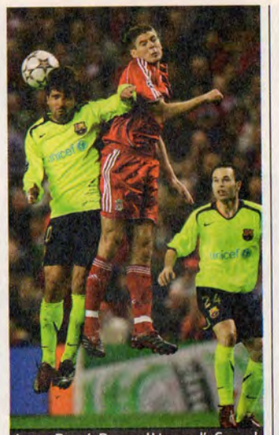
Inter had twice taken the lead in the first leg – through Cambiasso and Maicon – only to be pegged back each time by an injury-ravaged Valencia. David Villa made it 1-1, and then a sparkling volley from David Silva four minutes from time ensured the Spaniards had the edge for the second leg.

At Mestalla, the hosts could field many of their previously sidelined players and held out for the goalless draw that ensured victory.

PSV through after Alex scores for both sides

A season that had looked so promising for Arsenal just a fortnight earlier was snuffed out by PSV. The Eindhoven club travelled to London with a slender lead from the first leg courtesy of an Edison Mendez strike and ensured their progress after Brazilian defender Alex cancelled out his own own goal on the hour by hitting a late equaliser.

Alex, who is only on loan at PSV, from Chelsea, snatched the winner when he headed in a Mendez free-kick.



Leap...Barca's Deco and Liverpool's Gerrard

Arsenal never really got to grips with PSV's physical approach, and given that it was a PSV player who scored for them, the Gunners had once again failed to score against Dutch opposition on home turf.

Unspectacular Chelsea squeeze past Porto

Chelsea almost did the unthinkable and lose against Porto, the former club of manager Jose Mourinho. But after conceding early goals in both legs, they rallied to take their place in the last eight.

Chelsea had a disastrous start to the first leg, in Portugal, going behind to a Raul Meireles strike in the 12th minute shortly after captain John Terry had sustained what looked to be a serious ankle injury. And though Andrii Shevchenko equalised just four minutes later and Terry had recovered in time for the second leg, Chelsea's problems were far from over.

Ricardo Quaresma put Porto back in front in the tie after 15 minutes at Stamford Bridge, and the hosts did not find their feet until after half-time. The equaliser came when keeper Helton somehow let a relatively tame Arjen Robben shot evade his grasp, and then Michael Ballack volleyed the winner 12 minutes from time.

Barcelona outmuscled by Liverpool

Barcelona maintained the tradition, unbroken for almost two decades, that European Cup holders do not successfully defend their trophy. For all their technique and attacking ambition, Frank Rijkaard's side had no answer to Liverpool's superior power and organisation.

For Liverpool, a "team-bonding" trip to Portugal had ended in acrimony – there were accusations that Craig Bellamy had attacked John Arne Riise with a golf club after the Norwegian had refused to take part in a karaoke session. Inevitably, the pair both scored in Liverpool's 2-1 victory at Camp Nou in the opening leg. After Deco had headed Barca into an early lead, Bellamy capitalised on a mistake by keeper Victor Valdes, and Riise, set up by Bellamy, hit the winner with 15 minutes remaining.

Ronaldinho, who had been poor in the first leg, played as a central striker in the return, with Samuel Eto'o, still working his way back from injury, on the left of a three-man attack. But neither was effective, and Liverpool had the majority of the possession and scoring chances. A late strike from Barca substitute Eidur Gudjohnsen set up a frantic final quarter-hour, but Liverpool held on for a memorable away-goals victory.

United see off Lille

The first leg, played at Lens' Stade Felix-Bollaert stadium, was mired in controversy. First, poor policing and ticketing control forced United fans to break through security fences to avoid a crush. Then Lens players and coaching staff reacted angrily to Ryan Giggs' controversial goal, the only one of the game, from a free-kick that had been taken while Lille were still organising their wall.

A threatened walk-off did not happen, but bad feeling carried over to the second leg. The tie was eventually settled in the 72nd minute by Henrik Larsson, to end his loan spell at United from Helsingborgs in style.

Bayern win battle of heavyweights

Neither Bayern Munich nor Real Madrid had been in great shape going into the tie, but the Spanish side, with David Beckham back in the starting line-up, had rattled up a 3-1 lead by half-time of the first leg at the Bernabeu.

Quick goal...Makaay (centre) for Bayern

But former Barcelona player Mark Van Bommel popped up with a late second for Bayern to give his side a fighting chance in the return.

The Bavarians were level on aggregate after just 10 seconds in Munich, Roy Makaay scoring the quickest ever Champions League goal after Hasan Salihamidzic took advantage when Roberto Carlos lost possession from the kick-off. A Lucio header midway through the second half put Bayern ahead in the tie for the first time, and there was then a pulsating end to the game. Both sides had a player sent off – Van Bommel and Mahamadou Diarra – Ruud Van Nistelrooy scored for the visitors from the penalty spot with seven minutes remaining, and Madrid defender Sergio Ramos had a goal disallowed. But Bayern clung on for an away-goals win.

Scintillating...Roma's Mancini hit a beauty

Roma stun Lyon

Roma had been criticised for their negative approach in the first, home leg, a 0-0 draw, during which there were 11 yellow cards – including one for a shocking foul by Philippe Mexes on Juninho Pernambucano – but little goalmouth action.

However, the Italians' approach paid dividends in the second leg as they hit Lyon with two sucker-punches in the first half. First, Francesco Totti headed in Max Tonetto's cross, then Mancini scored one of the individual goals of the season, a scintillating stepover routine that bamboozled right-back Anthony Reveillere followed by a fierce shot past Gregory Coupet.

Gavin Hamilton

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Calm after the storm...Lokomotiv Leipzig fans clean up the terraces at the Bruno-Plache stadium in a positive gesture to contrast with the hooligans' destructive antics of the previous week

GERMANY

Violence in the east

JUST EIGHT MONTHS after the largely harmonious street life of the World Cup, football violence has sadly resurfaced in eastern Germany, in the Saxony capital Leipzig. A regional cup match between Lokomotiv Leipzig – the former DDR giants now in the sixth tier of the domestic game – and Erzgebirge Aue's reserves was the stage chosen by the hooligan hordes.

The game was held up twice as smoke bombs and fireworks went off in all directions. Then, following Aue's 3-0 victory, a group of 800 Leipzig fans launched a frenzied attack on police and other security staff, hurling paving stones, concrete slabs and anything else that came to hand.

Thirty-nine police officers were injured, six supporters required treatment but, amazingly, only five arrests were made at the time, though a number of wrongdoers were later rounded up after tip-offs from the public and examination of video footage.

"I'm surprised there weren't any deaths," said a dog handler, while the police federation accused Lokomotiv of neglecting basic security issues and of closing their eyes to the large quantity of fireworks being smuggled into the stadium. "If clubs cannot get things under control, then they should not complain when they have to play matches without spectators," declared police union chief Konrad Freiberg.

Football federation chief Theo Zwanziger stated the obvious when he claimed the depressed economy and high unemployment in the east were stoking the fires of lawlessness, but wisely added that the football authorities could not hide from their responsibilities. He warned that if thugs continued to run amok, the grounds of the clubs in question would be closed for good. Also, Zwanziger persuaded the Saxony League to cancel its games the next weekend, saying it would be a "gesture of solidarity with the forces of law and order".

Lokomotiv skipper Holger Krauss insisted he and his team-mates would walk off the pitch if trouble flared again. All power to those prepared to stand up for a peaceful sport. However, it will not be an easy message to sell. With the mayhem of Leipzig still fresh in the memory, fans of another Saxony club, Dynamo Dresden, thought it a good idea to protest at a defeat by brandishing fake pistols at their players at training.

Over to football. Ex-Schalke, Hertha and Koln coach Huub Stevens has made an impressive start at Hamburg. The team were a fragmented, unmotivated troupe under predecessor Thomas Doll, seemingly doomed to fall out of the Bundesliga for the first time. But Stevens has restored belief, unity and defensive organisation.

Four straight wins in February and early March, including sensational victories at Werder Bremen and Schalke, moved Hamburg rapidly away from the relegation zone. There should be little chance of a relapse, provided key men such as seasoned keeper Frank Rost and Dutch midfield genius Rafael Van der Vaart continue their fine form.

Nick Bidwell

FRANCE

Baup a winner with Toulouse

TOULOUSE COACH Elie Baup may not be the most media-friendly of France's footballing personalities, but is arguably the man of the season so far having lifted his club to third place.

Last summer, he took over a side that had crawled over the finishing line in 16th position and no small amount of disarray. Yet without splashing out big money or tinkering too much with the personnel the 52-year-old has turned the perennial underachievers around.

Two key signings – Brazilian midfielder Fabinho and Swedish striker Johan Elmander – plus a serious hardening of attitude on the pitch have allowed Toulouse to blossom. But Baup's tactical nous has also had a major part to play – witness the 3-0 stroll at home to fellow high-fliers Marseille, a result that owed much to the coach's masterly gameplan.

The club have always had decent support, and 35,000 turned up against Marseille. But the baseball-capped Baup has really given the fans something to shout about. And don't they just love him!

Baup, a local man, ran the club's academy from 1984 to 1991, bringing Fabien Barthez through the ranks, before stints at Saint-Etienne and Bordeaux. He won the League with the latter in 1999, but is still relatively unknown outside France. And it is likely to take more than Champions League qualification for the wider football world to take notice of the chisel-faced coach. Within France, the season has enhanced Baup's reputation as a man who gets results without a lot of fuss.

As Toulouse soar, Nantes are in a desperate battle to stay up after more than 40 years in the top flight. Going into March they were six points away from safety with a dozen games left.

When, ironically, Nantes thumped Toulouse 4-0 away in December and followed up with a 1-0 home win against Nice, it looked as if a corner might have been turned but they then went six games without a win. The club is barely recognisable from the one that used to be so proud of its stability, work ethic and ability to produce new talent.

The coaching double act of Michel Der Zakarian and Japhet N'Doram now have the task of rescuing Nantes following the dismissal of Georges Eo in February. The latter had taken the reins only in September, from Serge Le Dizet.

Paris Saint-Germain are still also in relegation danger. Their mini-revival under new coach Paul Le Guen was brought to an end by a 2-0 home defeat to Saint-Etienne.

Howard Johnson

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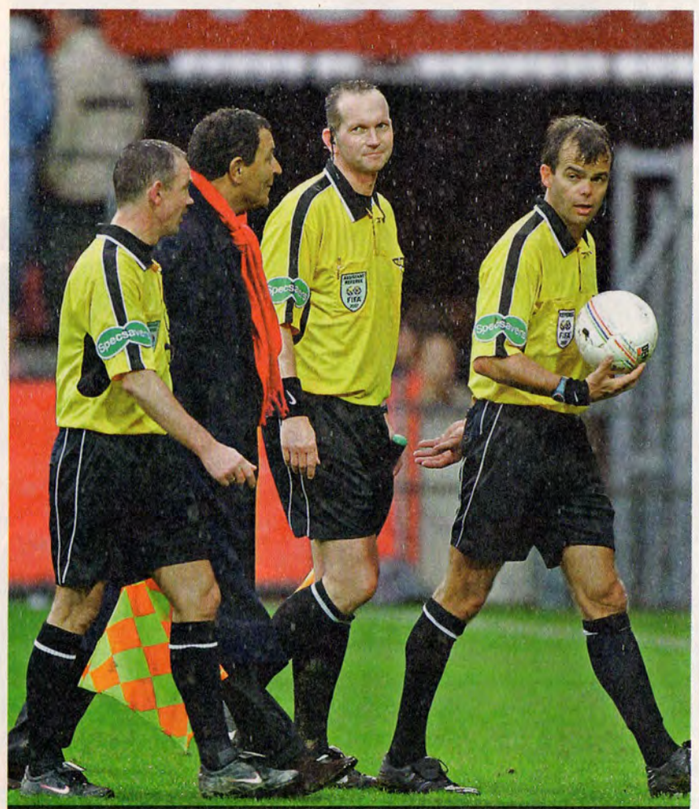
Keep it going, lads...Baup celebrates with his team after a goal against Lille

HOLLAND

PSV get let-off, Hiddink convicted


What's your game?...furious Ajax boss Henk Ten Cate gives referee Jan Wegereef a mouthful after the draw with AZ

LEAGUE LEADERS PSV Eindhoven got away relatively unscathed with their bad dip in form – one point from three games – as chasing duo Ajax and AZ Alkmaar failed to take advantage.

A 1-1 draw between the challengers in Alkmaar was no good to either of them, and Ajax coach Henk Ten Cate made his frustration clear. He berated referee Jan Wegereef for allowing AZ's equaliser to stand despite a clear foul by Demy de Zeeuw on goalkeeper Maarten Stekelenburg, and also claimed Ajax's Edgar Davids did not deserve to be sent off. "The result is FC Wegereef 2 Ajax 1," Ten Cate stormed. PSV beat Groningen 1-0 on the same weekend to go seven points clear of Ajax, with AZ a further point behind.

Former PSV boss Guus Hiddink has been given a six-month suspended sentence and fined £30,000 after being convicted of tax fraud. The coach evaded payment of about £900,000 in Dutch taxes by falsely claiming he was resident in Belgium, which has a much lower tax rate, in 2002 and 2003. Hiddink did buy a house in Belgium, just over the border from Holland, on his return to PSV after coaching South Korea, but never spent a night there.

He admitted during his trial that he slept in hotels, at his girlfriend's house, at the PSV training complex and even in his car. Hiddink said: "I never felt comfortable [in the Belgian house] and had no desire to lie staring at the ceiling."

It was a bad month all round for the coach, as his current charges, the Russian national team, lost 4-1 to Holland in a friendly in Amsterdam. AZ defender David Mendes Da Silva made his debut for the hosts.

Coach Huub Stevens has quit Roda JC to replace Thomas Doll at Hamburg. Sparta Rotterdam's Wiljan Vloet is to leave after falling out with the board. Former Sparta player Gert Aandewiel, in charge of second division Haarlem, is set to step in.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

PORTUGAL

Quaresma stars for club and country

National coach Luiz Felipe Scolari extended his unbeaten streak against his native Brazil to three matches when Portugal won 2-0 in London in the February friendly. Big Phil got a star performance from winger Ricardo Quaresma, who tormented Brazil's defence throughout and laid on the opening goal for Simao Sabrosa in the 82nd minute. Ricardo Carvalho hit the second with a minute remaining.

Quaresma was also in scintillating form for FC Porto as he helped them recover from a post-New Year blip with back-to-back victories in the League. After 20 rounds, the defending champions were four points clear of Benfica, who have also been impressing following Italian forward Fabrizio Miccoli's return from injury.

In contrast, Sporting Lisbon's attack continued to misfire, and the side may have said goodbye to their title hopes after a 0-0 draw at Uniao Leiria left them nine points behind the leaders.

Fourth-placed Sporting Braga unveiled their third manager of the season – former national team defender Jorge Costa, who is in place until the end of the campaign. Rogerio Goncalves, who succeeded Carlos Carvalhal earlier in the season, stepped down in mid-February after a 1-0 defeat at Uniao Leiria.

Pedro Pinto

AUSTRIA

Graz goes bust

Grazer AK have followed city rivals Sturm into financial meltdown, declaring bankruptcy after running up debts of £7million. "We have tried everything possible, but in the end we had to give in," said chairman Stephan Sticher.

A group of investors, including former club chairmen Rudi Roth and Harald Fischl, are thought to be attempting to raise the money needed to rescue the club.

Sturm filed for insolvency six months ago in the face of £6m debts.

Wacker Tirol are yet another top division side in financial straits. According to president Gerhard Stocker they need £1.5m to stay afloat.

Harry Miltner

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Champions Shels demoted

Premier League champions Shelbourne have been demoted to the first division because of their dire financial state. The club's top-flight licence was withdrawn and has instead been handed to Waterford United, who had been due to play at the second level.

Shels lost the majority of their squad during the close season having failed to pay wages on several occasions last term, breaking their contract with the players, who thus were free to leave Tolka Park. Dermot Keely has returned as manager but had less than a week to assemble a squad before the transfer deadline closed on February 28.

Shelbourne have also dropped out of the all-Ireland Setanta Cup and seemed almost certain to have their UEFA licence revoked. Derry City, last season's runners-up, are likely to get the Champions League spot instead.

Cork City have signed two former Irish internationals – Gareth Farrelly, who was player-manager of Bohemians last season, and ex-Sunderland midfielder Colin Healy.

Sean Creedon

LIECHTENSTEIN

Weller steps up

Hanjo Weller, formerly coach of Vaduz's under-19 side, has taken the senior team reins following the dismissal of Maurizio Jacobacci. Vaduz have also made two notable player signings – Macedonia midfielder Artim Sakiri from Finnish side Inter Turku, and Italian striker Michele Polverino (Olbia). It is the latter's second spell at the club. Striker Juan Manuel Sara has left for Italian lower league side Gallipoli.

Graeme Crawford

BELGIUM

Lolo caught on camera

THE FEDERATION HAS used television pictures for the first time to punish a player retrospectively. Igor Lolo, Germinal Beerschot's Ivorian defender, was given a three-game ban for hitting Cercle Brugge counterpart Jimmy Dewulf in the face during a game last December. Referee Didier De Block did not see the incident, but the federation acted following protests from Cercle.

Club Brugge have appointed Macedonian coach Cedomir Janevski to replace Emilio Ferrera, who was sacked after the team's first home defeat of the season, against Roeselare. The loss came the day after sporting director Marc Degryse resigned.

Janevski, a former Club Brugge player, began with a 2-0 win at Beveren, then saw his new charges lose a 2-0 lead at home to champions Anderlecht and end up with a 2-2 draw.

Anderlecht, who have extended coach Frankie Vercauteren's contract until summer 2008, strengthened their defence during the transfer window, bringing in Swede Max Von Schleebrugge and Pole Marcin Wasilewski, though the latter showed attacking prowess by scoring in both his first two games.

Genk, who led the table going into March, two points clear of Anderlecht, could make only limited use of new Brazilian striker Jaja because of his lack of match-fitness.

Former Anderlecht favourite Jan Koller opened the scoring for the Czech Republic in their 2-0 friendly defeat of Belgium in Brussels. Current Anderlecht defender Anthony Vanden Borre was sent off for bringing down Marek Kulic, scorer of the other goal. Belgium coach Rene Vandereycken gave debuts to midfielders Marouane Fellaini of Standard Liege and Maarten Martens of AZ Alkmaar.

Nicholas Harling

Punch penalty...Lolo was banned for three games

Let's shake...Bigon (left) is greeted by Basle's Gross

SWITZERLAND

Bigon back after axe falls again

SION ARE ON to their fifth coach of the season, Italian Alberto Bigon, after owner and renowned hatchet-man Christian Constantin swung the axe once again. Gabet Chapuisat was the latest victim following three defeats in a row either side of the winter break.

It is Bigon's second spell in charge having guided Sion to the Double in 1997. He was sacked in September that year after their failure in the Champions League qualifiers. The 60-year-old, who has been out of football since losing his job at Olympiakos in 2000, said: "This is a new start for me after years playing golf. My target is a UEFA Cup place."

Bigon will have his work cut out to achieve that, however, since Sion were only fifth at the end of February, four points off the UEFA Cup placings.

Brazilian forward Ailton, on loan at Grasshopper from Red Star Belgrade, scored the only goal of his debut, away to Aarau.

National team keeper Pascal Zuberbuhler is back in Swiss football, with second division Neuchatel Xamax, after a spell at West Bromwich Albion.

National team coach Kobi Kuhn has promised to get to grips with the unruly elements within the squad after being criticised for being too soft by the media and FA president Ralph Zloczower. The knives came out after Switzerland lost 3-1 to Germany in February, their third consecutive defeat after reverses against Austria and Brazil.

Ivar von Rulach

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SWEDEN

Zlatan mixed messages

Confused? You will be...Ibrahimovic has apparently changed his mind about appearing for Sweden

THERE HAS BEEN widespread confusion in Sweden about whether or not Zlatan Ibrahimovic is to end his national team boycott, which began last autumn after he was sent home for breaking a training camp curfew before a Euro 2008 qualifier.

In an Italian sports magazine interview, the Internazionale striker suggested he was to stay out in the cold, saying: "I've got my motives. There is nothing more to discuss." However, some days later, national coach Lars Lagerback said he had spoken to Ibrahimovic and that the player had agreed to return to the fold. Sweden's next game is on March 28, a Euro 2008 tie away to Northern Ireland.

Lagerback has come under fire for his handling of the situation, with some suggesting his lack of diplomacy had driven the striker away. One columnist wrote: "Now we know what sort of players Lagerback wants for Sweden. They must be quiet, loyal, hard-working – and completely free of tattoos" – a reference to the fact that Ibrahimovic has the names and dates of birth of his family emblazoned on his arms.

Pentti Hietanen

DENMARK

Royal procession

Brondby and deadly rivals FC Copenhagen both reached the quarter-finals of the Royal League, the competition for the top sides in Scandinavia, after winning one game each of their head-to-head group ties.

Brondby triumphed 1-0 in the first encounter, at Copenhagen, as the "shock therapy" of new coach Tom Kohlert had an immediate impact. Kohlert, who replaced the beleaguered Rene Meulensteen, axed four players from the squad, one of them, surprisingly, being national team full-back Asbjorn Sennels. Copenhagen, the defending Royal League champions, won the return 3-1.

Thomas Helveg has returned to Denmark after 13 years abroad, joining hometown club OB Odense from Borussia Monchengladbach.

Jim Holden

NORWAY

Rosenborg win at last

Champions Rosenborg have finally started to win again after a miserable run of pre-season results. The Trondheim club beat Lillestrom 3-2 in La Manga, Spain, Steffen Iversen hitting the winner 20 minutes from time. Rosenborg will be particularly encouraged by the forward's partnership with Yssouf Kone, which looks as if it could be very fruitful.

Lyn have welcomed Nigerian striker Chinedi "Edu" Ogbuke back into the fold after a transfer to Lokomotiv Moscow broke down and he failed to secure a contract with Portsmouth because he did not have a work permit.

Tromso, who only just avoided relegation last term, made it six wins on the trot with a 1-0 defeat of Viking, also in La Manga.

The national team put in a dismal display in the friendly away to Croatia in February and deservedly lost 2-1. Brann duo Petter Vaagan Moen, the scorer, and goalkeeper Hakon Opdal were the only Norway players to shine.

Sigurd Odegaard

FINLAND

Swiss roles

Switzerland has become a favourite destination for Finnish players, with no fewer than four joining Swiss clubs during the winter. National team stopper Hannu Tihinen started the trend when signing for Zurich last summer. The new arrivals are defenders Veli Lampi (Zurich, from HJK Helsinki), Ari Nyman (Thun, from Inter Turku) and Toni Kallio (Young Boys, from Norway's Molde) and striker Juho Makela (Thun, on loan from Hearts).

Promising AEK Athens midfielder Perparim Hetemaj broke an ankle during the Finland B team's 2-2 draw away to Scotland and will be sidelined for at least four months.

TPS Turku have signed former national team midfielder Simo Valakari from FC Dallas, while Honka have sold skipper Sampo Koskinen to Norway's Sandefjord.

Pentti Hietanen

ICELAND

Top Geir

FA general secretary Geir Thorsteinsson won the election to replace Eggert Magnusson as president with a massive 73 per cent of the vote. Thorsteinsson, Magnusson's preferred candidate, gained 86 of the 118 votes, businessman Jafet Olafsson 29 and journalist Halla Gunnarsdottir, the first woman to stand for president, only three.

The new general secretary is Thorir Hakonarson, currently chairman of second division KS.

The FA AGM also decided to increase the size of the top division to 12 teams from 10 from the 2008 season.

Rab Christie

LATVIA

Miholaps moves east

Skonto Riga's Mihails Miholaps, league top scorer last season with 15 goals, has joined Kazakh side Shakhtyor Karagandy in a one-year deal. His replacement is 27-year-old Slovakian Marian Dirnbach from Inter Bratislava.

Andres Must

SCOTLAND

Romanov – nuts and bananas!

Hearts owner Vladimir Romanov has caused yet more controversy by accusing referees of accepting bribes to favour Rangers and Celtic and then describing Scottish football journalists as "monkeys". The latter comment was underlined by the provision of a tray of bananas and peanuts in the Hearts press room at the next home game.

Runaway league leaders Celtic remain on course for the Double after snatching victory from the jaws of defeat away to Inverness Caledonian Thistle in the Scottish Cup quarter-finals.

Steven Pressley and Kenny Miller scored in the last few dramatic moments after it had looked as if Graham Bayne's 18th-minute goal would put the underdogs through.

Hibernian beat Queen of the South, also 2-1, to retain the chance of winning two cups – they face Kilmarnock in the League Cup Final on March 18. Dunfermline and St Johnstone are the two other Scottish Cup semi-finalists.

Alan Fairley

WALES

Saints eye hat-trick

The New Saints are still on course for a hat-trick of league titles as they went into March four points clear of closest challengers Rhyl. At the bottom, Airbus UK won three games in a row to leave Caernarfon as clear favourites to be the team to take the drop. The latter were seven points adrift at the bottom having won only one of their previous 11 games.

Mel Thomas

NORTHERN IRELAND

Roof falls in on home ties

THE NATIONAL TEAM are facing the prospect of playing "home" games elsewhere in the UK because of the poor state of the North Stand roof at Belfast's Windsor Park. It was damaged in storms over the Christmas holiday and must be replaced at a cost of about £325,000, an amount that the FA "simply doesn't have", according to president Jim Boyce.

A temporary safety certificate, issued before the friendly against Wales in February, expires after the Euro 2008 qualifier against Sweden on March 28.

No other venue in the province comes up to the standard required to stage a national team game. The next scheduled home match is a Euro 2008 tie against Liechtenstein on August 22.

Glentoran's mediocre league form was compounded by defeat on penalties by Portadown in the Irish Cup.

Former Newry City player Gerry Flynn has taken the managerial reins at the club, replacing Roy Coyle.

Roy Kitson

Question of cover...the Irish FA cannot afford to repair the damaged North Stand roof at Windsor Park

Future unclear...Zahhovaiko

ESTONIA

Kuwaiting game

FLORA TALLINN and national team striker Vjatseslav Zahhovaiko has been left in limbo after the Al Kuwait club cancelled the five-month loan deal he had signed two weeks earlier. They claimed Zahhovaiko had failed a medical, even though they had earlier said there had been no problems.

Although Zahhovaiko returned to Tallinn, he did not unpack his bags, saying: "It can all change overnight. Legally, I'm still an Al Kuwait player."

Flora president Aivar Pohlak, who has contacted FIFA, said: "We signed a good contract and are also supported by international rules."

Another former Flora player, Joel Lindpere, has joined Tromso of Norway.

Andres Must

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TURKEY

Overpaid and over here

TURKISH FOOTBALL has a love-hate relationship with foreign coaches, and the recent travails of Fenerbahce (Zico), Galatasaray (Eric Gerets) and Besiktas (Jean Tigana) has added a good dose of ridicule to the mix.

Fener contrived to lose to AZ Alkmaar in the UEFA Cup first knockout round and then followed up by going down 1-0 at Antalyaspor in the League. On the same weekend, Galatasaray were held to a 1-1 draw at home to lowly Denizlispor, and Besiktas, who had looked so sharp just after the winter break, lost 3-2 at Trabzonspor having led 2-0 at half-time.

One newspaper called the coaches the "Comedy Dance Trio", after a famous Turkish cabaret act, while the media in general reminded the public that Zico, Gerets and Tigana earned more than £4million a year between them. If the teams were coached by Turks, the thinking went, at least they would fail on the cheap.

Failure is relative, of course. The three clubs still occupied the top three positions, Fenerbahce six points clear of Galatasaray, with Besiktas a further two points back. But that cut no ice with ardent Fener fans, who put an appeal to the club on their website that read: "Are you mocking us? Are you not planning to step in and put a stop to this bad state of affairs?"

Columnist Basri Baykoc wrote that Besiktas ought to find out about exorcising "djinns" (the fiery spirits of Islamic mythology) so inexplicably terrible had their football been of late.

As for Gerets, Galatasaray surprisingly handed him a one-year extension in the aftermath of the Denizlispor debacle, apparently so he would not be distracted by speculation about his future.

Suna Erdem

Three stooges?...coaches Gerets, Zico and Tigana have all been subjected to ridicule

GREECE

Lemonis accused of racism

AEK Athens' Albania-born midfielder Panagiotis Kone has accused Olympiakos coach Takis Lemonis of making racist comments during the teams' 3-3 draw in early February.

"When I was complaining to [Olympiakos player] Rivaldo about a foul, members of his team on the bench and Mr Lemonis made racist remarks about my birthplace," Kone said.

"The remarks have offended me as a person and as a footballer who honours the jersey of the national team of Greece."

The 19-year-old, who has lived in Greece for seven years, had won his second cap for the national Under-21s a few days earlier, ironically against Albania. Lemonis, who has just received a two-year contract extension, denies the allegation.

Lou Economopoulos

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Four to break boycott

The majority of national team regulars have vowed to continue their boycott of games in the hope that the action will bring about changes in the federation hierarchy.

Only four – Mirko Hrgovic, Mladen Bartolovic (both of Hajduk Split), Dzemal Berberovic (Litex Lovech, Bulgaria) and Vladan Grujic (Sarajevo) – have said they will return for the next match, a Euro 2008 qualifier in Norway.

Interestingly, Grujic is the first player to return to Bosnian football from abroad since independence. The midfielder, who started out with hometown club Borac Banja Luka, appeared for Red Star Belgrade, Koln, Alaniya Vladikavkaz and Lovech before joining Sarajevo in January on a year's loan from the Bulgarian club.

Zdravko Reic

MONTENEGRO

The Russians are coming

Russian shipping conglomerate Delo Group, led by Sergey Shishkaryov, looks set to buy second division club Bokelj, with plans to build a new stadium, training facilities and hotel. The club, based in Kotor on the Adriatic coast, have already taken on no fewer than six Russian players.

Vladimir Novak

CROATIA

Dinamo in charge

League leaders Dinamo Zagreb beat closest challengers and arch-rivals Hajduk Split 2-1 at home in a game that could decide the title. The result gave Dinamo, the defending champions, a six-point lead.

For the first time in many years, the match passed without incident, with no fan trouble either in the stadium or on the streets. This was good for Croatia's Euro 2012 bid (joint with Hungary) since UEFA representatives were at the game to assess a live match experience in the country before hosting rights are decided in April. Italy, who have been favourites to stage the tournament, are in the midst of a hooligan crisis that may well count against their bid.

Zdravko Reic

SLOVENIA

Interblock's big spree

Bottom side Interblock, formerly known as Factor, have brought in 11 new players and appointed a new coach, Dragan Skocic, in an attempt to get away from the relegation zone. The new squad members include former internationals Marinko Galic, Amir Karic, Zoran Pavlovic, Moamer Vugdalic and goalkeeper Marko Simeunovic.

The spending spree came after the Ljubljana club was bought by Joze Pececnik, one of Slovenia's richest men, who has said he dreams of creating a "Slovenian Chelsea".

Zdravko Reic

ISRAEL

Maccabi suffer at home

Maccabi Haifa earned plaudits for their defeat of CSKA Moscow in the UEFA Cup first knockout round, but their hopes of claiming a fourth consecutive domestic title have all but disappeared after a series of lacklustre performances. A 1-1 draw away to Hapoel Kfar Saba left Maccabi 11 points behind leaders Beitar Jerusalem with 11 rounds to play.

Ori Lewis

ALBANIA

Tirana close in

League leaders SK Tirana bounced back from a surprise 2-1 home defeat to Besa by beating Flamurtari 2-0, also at home, three days later. The result kept them eight points clear of nearest rivals Teuta, prompting coach Shkelqim Muca to say: "The other teams can't win the title, only we can lose it."

Gezim Nushi

CYPRUS

Crisis in officialdom

The country's refereeing is in crisis after the entire FA referee committee quit in the face of repeated claims that members were influencing match officials to show favouritism to certain clubs.

Critics of the committee have also claimed that no matter how many mistakes referees appear to make, they invariably receive high marks from their evaluators, who themselves come under the committee's aegis.

Soulis Theodosiou

MALTA

Anniversary draw

The national team achieved a creditable 1-1 draw with Austria as they celebrated the 50th anniversary of their first international – also against the Austrians. Both captains scored, the hosts' Gilbert Agius in the eighth minute, with Andreas Ivanschitz equalising three minutes later.

Hibernians and Malta striker Terence Scerri has been banned from domestic matches for eight months for assaulting a referee.

Domenico Aquilina

SERBIA

Partizan's derby joy

PARTIZAN, UNDER NEW coach Miroslav Djukic, beat leaders Red Star 4-2 away in the 128th Belgrade derby to rekindle hopes of a championship challenge. The visitors showed plenty of determination and could have won by even more as their rivals gave a disastrous display.

It was Partizan's first league victory over Red Star since April 2001 and the first at the Marakana stadium for over 10 years.

Djukic's side were still nine points behind the leaders, but there are two more derbies to come since, for the first time, the top six will play each other home and away in championship play-offs at the end of the regular season.

Vozdovac coach Dusan Jevric resigned after his side lost both their first two league games of the spring campaign. His replacement is Miroslav Vukasinovic.

Vladimir Novak

You're surrounded...Red Star's Koroman can make little headway against the Partizan defence in the Belgrade derby

Presidential...Hadzi-Risteski with FIFA's Blatter

MACEDONIA

President: Should I stay or should I go?

BELEAGUERED president Haralampie Hadzi-Risteski has called on the March 17 federation congress to vote on whether he should remain in control.

Hadzi-Risteski has been widely accused of financial mismanagement and maladministration, and is also implicated in an alleged cover-up relating to federation documents.

General secretary Lazar Mitrovski, who has now resigned, is accused of having used a forged university diploma to help him obtain the position. Police suspect that reference to the diploma was deleted from federation records. Both men deny any wrongdoing.

A campaign for changes in the federation hierarchy is being led by former international referee Emil Bozinovski, with former European Cup winner Darko Pancev recently joining the ranks.

Stevica Ristic, league top scorer for the past two seasons with Sileks, has joined South Korea's Chonbuk Hyundai. The Serbia-born forward, now a Macedonian citizen, scored his first goal for the national team in the 1-0 friendly win in Albania on February 7.

Former national team forward Blaze Ilijoski is back at league leaders Rabotnicki Kometal, where he is joined by ex-Vardar striker Ivan Trickovski. Makedonija have lost top scorer Filip Ivanovski to Groclin of Poland.

Michel Stojmanovski

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UKRAINE

Federation at eye of drugs storm

Under pressure...federation president Hryhorii Surkis has been urged to name and shame the guilty players

REVELATIONS ABOUT widespread drug abuse among players and the federation's failure to act has plunged the domestic game into a major crisis.

The scandal blew up after federation executive director Olexander Bandurko wrote to the top division clubs saying players would be dope-tested before the start of the second half of the season. This was routine, but the letter also dropped the bombshell that there had been 16 positive tests during 2006. This had not been known outside the federation (UFF), and the fact Bandurko mentioned it was an apparent oversight. The following day, Metalurh Donetsk made the letter public by posting it on their website and club vice-president Dmitry Seluk demanded the federation name the guilty players and how it had punished them.

Initially, the UFF stated the positive tests, all for excessive testosterone, had been conducted during the close season and therefore the players could not be banned during the regular championship. But Metalurh doctor Olexander Virkun revealed that one player – Arsenal Kyiv midfielder Serhii Litovchenko – had tested positive during the league campaign, following a game against Metalurh last November.

Professional Football League president Ravil Safiullin demanded the federation explain why it had concealed not only Litovchenko's case but widespread drug abuse by top-flight players.

"I don't trust the federation any more," Safiullin said. "The UFF has to name all positive-tested players. They have to be punished according to FIFA rules, regardless of whether the tests were out of season."

Oleh Pechernyi, head of the players' union, added: "We have to know all the details about this scandal or else any club in the second half of the championship could demand a replay of any match by raising the suspicion their rivals have positive-tested players."

Under-pressure UFF president Hryhorii Surkis called an extraordinary executive meeting, after which it was revealed that 10 players had tested positive last year, Litovchenko on no fewer than six occasions.

However, Surkis felt the excessive testosterone tests in the close season could have an innocent explanation, since it is a natural "sex hormone". He said: "The players are young, energetic and spend a lot of time with their girlfriends in the holidays."

Oleg Zadernovsky

CZECH REPUBLIC

Starka out on bail

Marila Pribram chairman Jaroslav Starka has been released on bail nearly three months after being remanded on murder and abduction charges. Starka, who is accused of being involved in the killing of businessman Lambert Krejcir, had suffered diabetes-related health problems while in jail.

Goalkeeper Tomas Postulka has rejoined Sparta Prague and defender Tomas Hunal has moved to Marila Pribram after Teplice told them that their contracts would not be renewed in the summer. Highly-rated national Under-21 defender Roman Hubnik has joined FC Moscow on loan from Sigma Olomouc until the end of June, when he is expected to sign a permanent deal.

The national team made an encouraging start to the year, beating Belgium 2-0 in a friendly in Brussels. Slovan Liberec defender Daniel Pudil won his first cap, having been called up from the Under-21s as late injury cover.

Sam Beckwith

POLAND

Scandal clubs face expulsion

The FA's disciplinary committee has said it will hand out severe punishments to clubs involved in the country's match-fixing scandal, with the media suggesting that the sanctions could include expulsion from the League.

Top division sides Arka Gdynia and Gornik Leczna are among those under scrutiny, while Zawisza Bydgoszcz, one of the second-level clubs in the dock, have already withdrawn from the League in anticipation of the FA's verdict. The board put the club up for sale for a symbolic one zloty.

League leaders GKS Belchatow entered the spring campaign without top scorer Radoslaw Matusiak, who has joined Palermo for £1.35million. Lech Poznan also lost a key man, defender Marcin Wasilewski, to Anderlecht.

Pogon Szczecin owner Antoni Ptak has repeated his Brazilian bulk-buy experiment despite its singular failure last season. Ptak, who has a football academy near Sao Paulo, signed 16 Brazilians during the winter break in 2005-06 but the club still finished only 11th out of 16. Now, with the club once again facing a relegation struggle, he has bought another 11 Brazilians to create a virtually new squad.

Dariusz Kurowski

BULGARIA

Silverware for Stoichkov

The national team beat hosts Cyprus 3-0 in the Final of a four-team international tournament to bring Hristo Stoichkov his first piece of silverware as a coach.

Dimitar Berbatov scored twice to take his tally to 33, just four behind Stoichkov's own haul. Hristo Bonev is the record holder with 47 goals. Bulgaria beat Latvia 2-0 in the semi-finals.

CSKA Sofia owner Pramod Mittal has promised the squad a share of a £650,000 bonus if they win the league title. At the winter break, CSKA were two points behind arch-rivals Levski, whose finance director Konstantin Bazhdekov sniped that the Indian would be able to keep his money since Levski would win the championship.

Rumen Paytashev

HUNGARY

Priskin bags the lot

Watford striker Tamas Priskin scored all Hungary's three goals in the four-team Cyprus international tournament. The team lost 2-1 to the hosts in the semi-finals but beat Latvia 2-0, in which Internazionale signing Attila Filkor made his debut, to take third place.

Peterjon Cresswell

RUSSIA

Calls grow for season shift

THERE IS A growing clamour for the domestic season to be switched to a western European August-to-May pattern following the UEFA Cup first knockout round defeats of CSKA Moscow and city rivals Spartak.

The Russian League runs from March to November, meaning players are simply not match-fit when the European club competitions start up again in February.

Champions CSKA lost 1-0 on aggregate to Maccabi Haifa, who are only mid-table in their domestic championship, while league runners-up Spartak lost 3-2 to Celta Vigo, 18th out of 20 in the Spanish League at the time of the second leg.

However, moving the season would be difficult logistically. The bad winter weather would make it hard to fit in all the league games, while there would barely be enough indoor arenas and artificial pitches for the Premier Liga, let alone the lower leagues.

The national team, who are virtually all home-based, also lost in February, 4-1 to Holland in a friendly in Amsterdam. Ivan Saenko, the only overseas-based player – with Nurnberg of Germany – was Russia's only truly fit player.

This season's league campaign was due to begin on March 10 with the maximum number of foreign players allowed on the pitch at any one time reduced to seven per team from eight. The League intends to get the limit down to five over the next few years.

Victor Gusev

Push comes to shove...Spartak Moscow's Nikita Bazhenov tussles with Diego Placente of Celta Vigo during the UEFA Cup tie

Bucharest arrival...Mateus

ROMANIA

Dinamo gear up for Europe

RUNAWAY LEAGUE leaders Dinamo Bucharest have handed coach Mircea Rednic a one-year contract extension as they gear up for another attempt to reach the Champions League group stage. The new deal was agreed just a day after this season's European journey ended, Dinamo losing 3-1 on aggregate to Benfica in the UEFA Cup first knockout round.

The club had just signed two new players – French attacking midfielder Fabrice Fernandes from Beitar Jerusalem and Angolan midfielder Mateus from Gil Vicente – prompting Rednic to say: "We have to build a good team for the Champions League and these two are perfect choices for that." Dinamo have also bought Ecuador striker Darwin Caicedo.

Veteran Dorinel Munteanu was in line for a remarkable international comeback after agreeing to play again for his club, Arges Pitesti, having originally decided just to coach. National team boss Victor Piturca saw the 39-year-old put in a fine performance in his first game back, a 0-0 draw at home to Universitatea Craiova and said: "Munteanu played very well and he is in the frame for the Euro 2008 qualifier against Holland on March 24."

Radu Timofte

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ARGENTINA

River pay for gang mentality

FAN VIOLENCE RETURNED along with the football, the most notable incident being a fight between rival factions of River Plate's hooligan gang in a restaurant two hours before the team began their closing championship campaign at home to Lanus. One gang member suffered a bullet wound and there were a number of knife injuries, but the police made no arrests.

River, however, were ordered to play five home games on neutral grounds and had the club offices and facilities shut down until they expelled six of the gang leaders. River complied, though not until more than a week later.

A few days after the home game ban was imposed, a judge went to inspect the Monumental stadium and, apparently having received a tip-off, uncovered a stash of weapons in a locked room under one of the stands near the entrance usually used by the gang. This explains how they have been able to carry weapons at games despite police searches at the turnstiles.

Marcelo Parilli, a lawyer and long-time River member, confirmed the gang receive free tickets from the club, to sell on, and other benefits to the value of more than £10,000 a month.

A congressional committee, recently formed to study hooliganism, called on River president Jose Maria Aguilar to expand upon the club's relationship with the gang. This led to a moment of farce. When asked whether River gave free tickets to *La Doce* (the 12th man), a bemused Aguilar rightly said no. *La Doce* is the gang of arch-rivals Boca Juniors, suggesting the committee still has plenty of studying to do.

River fans had the last word, unfurling a huge banner at a game that said: "Aguilar, expel your gang and leave with them."

Juan Roman Riquelme was by far the most significant returnee from Europe during the mid-season break, joining his old club Boca on a six-month loan from Villarreal to replace Fernando Gago. Critics of the deal claimed teenager Ever Banega was quite up to filling the gap in midfield. However, Riquelme wasted no time in showing his quality and played alongside Banega in a 3-1 win over Independiente.

River and Arsenal both won their first three games to set the pace. In contrast, Newell's Old Boys lost all three, spelling the end for coach Nery Pumpido, the former national team keeper.

Eric Weil

No way in...the gates to River Plate's Monumental stadium remained locked until the club expelled six gang leaders

MEXICO

Troubled times

The domestic game's reputation for having peaceful crowds has been dented by three incidents in the opening weeks of the closing championship. Fans of visiting Pumas UNAM threw missiles on to the pitch at Veracruz, and there were hooligan incidents at Morelia's home match with Tigres and at the Azteca stadium during America's 1-0 defeat by Atlas.

The federation moved quickly to try to nip the problem in the bud, banning the organised supporters groups known as *porras* from attending away games, prohibiting clubs from giving free tickets to supporters' clubs, and ordering the installation of closed-circuit television in and around stadiums.

The emergence of the *porras*, who are often modelled on Argentina's *barras bravas* gangs, has livened up the atmosphere at matches, but they are being blamed for the increase in trouble.

A report in Buenos Aires sports newspaper *Ole* claimed Mexican fans were paying for classes in troublemaking from their more experienced Argentinian counterparts. *Barras* leaders even staged a "conference" in Pachuca where subjects included terrace chants and songs, the use of weapons, and methods of extorting money from club directors and players.

Ole said a leader of a Pumas UNAM supporters' club had twice visited Buenos Aires to obtain first-hand experience of the methods used by notorious Boca Juniors gang *La Doce*. The report claimed he stayed in a five-star hotel and continued the "course" on the internet after returning home.

Brian Homewood

CANADA

Argentina's big Impact

Montreal Impact have signed 21-year-old Argentinian attacking midfielder Martin Fabro from Independiente who will team up with compatriot Leonardo Di Lorenzo, formerly with Argentinos Juniors.

The club have also signed Brazilian striker Frederico Moojen and Canada defender Andres Arango.

Philippe Germain

Luck of the bounce...Sporting Cristal (in blue) and Mexico's America battle it out on the artificial turf of the national stadium in Lima

PERU

Burning question

THE COUNTRY'S artificial pitches are at the centre of a row after Sporting Cristal complained that six of their players were badly burned during an afternoon match on the synthetic turf at Alianza Atletico.

Five Peruvian grounds, including the National stadium in Lima, have the pitches, which were laid for the World Under-17 Championship in 2005.

Cristal said that artificial surfaces do not absorb the heat as well as grass, and it was excessively hot at the game at Alianza, who play in the desert town of Piura. "The players have first and second-degree burns and blisters," said team doctor Enrique Sanchez. "The temperature on the pitch was easily 43°C. I consider it to be physiologically wrong to submit a footballer to an activity on such a hot surface."

There is a widespread call for the reintroduction of natural surfaces, with some observers saying artificial turf can also cause injuries. Players' union president Francesco Manaserro said: "When you twist or stop quickly you can injure your knees or ankles."

Two coaches quit after just three league rounds – Jorge Amado Nunes at Universitario and Roberto Arrelucea at promoted Total Clean.

Brian Homewood

I'm in charge...Juan Angel Napout

PARAGUAY

Napout in to end dispute

PARAGUAY'S CLUBS have finally ended the squabbling that caused the start of the opening championship to be put on hold.

The row, about who should lead the FA, was resolved when Oscar Harrison, president since 1994, agreed not to run for re-election, and his former deputy Juan Angel Napout took over.

Harrison initially attempted to stall the election but this angered the clubs backing Napout – champions Libertad, Cerro Porteno, Olimpia, Guarani, Sol de America and 3 de Febrero. In protest, the six – half the top division – refused to play and there was even talk of a parallel competition being set up.

With the case heading towards the courts – and Paraguay thus in danger of a FIFA suspension – the bickering finally ended after sports minister Federico Frutos intervened. The League duly kicked off two weeks late.

Napout said it was the thought of the national team not being able to play two planned friendlies in March that forced the factions to reach agreement.

The new president's first act was to confirm Gerardo Martino as national team coach in succession to Uruguayan Anibal Ruiz, who quit after the World Cup.

The 44-year-old Argentinian already knows the Paraguayan game, having coached Libertad and Cerro Porteno. He has also led Colon Santa Fe in his homeland. Martino spent much of his playing career with Newell's Old Boys, winning a few caps for Argentina before the 1986 World Cup, and also had spells with Tenerife in Spain and Barcelona in Ecuador.

Brian Homewood

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums

worldsoccer.com

Off the bench...perceived man-management problems have spelled the end for Macala as Oman coach

OMAN

Macala fired after Final success

CZECH COACH Milan Macala was surprisingly fired by Oman having apparently done a fine job in leading the team, previously regarded as also-rans, to the Final of the Gulf Cup in January, three months after he had also steered them to qualification for the Asian Cup finals for only the second time in their history.

But federation chairman Sheikh Saif bin Hashil Al Maskari said there were good reasons for the sacking. "We have not taken the decision in haste," he said. "We did our homework after the Gulf Cup Final [which Oman lost 1-0 to hosts United Arab Emirates] and found there were differences between the coach and the players, who are professionals. We now need a coach who can treat the players as professionals. It was also discovered the players were not happy with the changes Macala made during the Final."

The burly Czech appeared baffled by his dismissal, though he did not criticise the federation. "I will not comment about their decision but I would like to say that Oman is now a successful country and has a good FIFA ranking," he said. "I'm proud that I took Oman for the second time in their history to the Asian Cup finals."

Macala undoubtedly achieved a lot with Oman. As well as their Asian Cup exploits, they had never previously done better than fourth in the Gulf Cup, an event in which Macala has a good track record having led Kuwait to back-to-back titles in 1996 and 1998.

Hamad Al Azzani has replaced the Czech on a temporary basis, but the federation is under pressure to find a suitable, long-term replacement with less than four months to go until the Asian Cup, in which Oman face co-hosts Thailand, Australia and Iraq in the group stage.

Michael Church

QATAR

Looking good for 2011

QATAR, who successfully staged the Asian Games last year, are favourites to host the 2011 Asian Cup after throwing their hat into the ring with India and Iran.

Under the Asian Football Confederation's policy of rotating the finals around its regions, the event is due to be held in either west or south Asia, thus preventing Australia from putting in a bid. The rights decision will be made during July's Asian Cup finals in South-east Asia.

Michael Church

Golden future...Qatar's Asian Games success has given them an Asian Cup boost

THAILAND

Chanvit reinstated

Chanvit Polchivin has made a dramatic return to his position as national team coach weeks after announcing he was taking up a lucrative post with newly promoted Vietnamese club Dong Thap.

However, the move fell through following a disagreement over terms and he was reinstated as Thailand boss.

Chanvit's decision to quit the Asian Cup co-hosts five months before the finals prompted the FA to rapidly line up assistant Thongsuk Sampahangsit as his replacement. The latter will now continue in his original role.

Chanvit, a former Asian Coach of the Year, made his original announcement after Thailand's defeat by Singapore in the Final of the ASEAN Championship, the regional tournament for south-east Asian countries.

Michael Church

ROUND-UP

ASIA

● Samarkand-Dynamo won the Federation Cup, the main knockout competition in UZBEKISTAN, for the first time with a 4-1 defeat of Almalyk MMC in the Final. Olympic team striker Aziz Ibrohimov has joined Slovan Bratislava from Mashaal.

● Nebitchi beat Double winners MTTU 3-2 in the TURKMENISTAN Super Cup.

● AUSTRALIA put in a poor performance in their 3-1 friendly defeat by Denmark in London in February. The Danes led 3-0 at half-time, all their goals having stemmed from defensive errors. The Socceroos' stand-in captain Brett Emerton scored their consolation goal with a magnificent free-kick five minutes from time.

Oleg Zadernovsky & Paul Moon

OCEANIA

● Waitakere United took a giant stride towards winning NEW ZEALAND'S regular season title when beating closest challengers Youngheart Manawatu 3-1. That put the west Aucklanders five points ahead with only two games remaining.

● GM United retained the championship in FIJI, beating Rewa United 4-1 on penalties after a 1-1 draw in the Final.

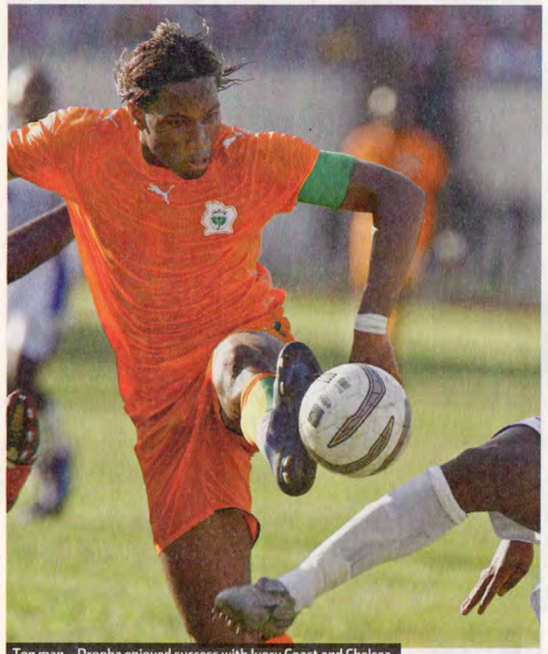
● A big slump in form prompted NEW CALEDONIA champions AS Mont Dore to sack coach Francois Tartas and bring in Christophe Oiremon. But they still dropped to second bottom in the domestic league and were beaten heavily in the Oceania Champions League by Waitakere United (6-1) and Auckland City (4-0).

Paul Moon

Going down...Australia's Tim Cahill takes a tumble against Denmark

AFRICAN FOOTBALLER OF THE YEAR

Drogba pips Eto'o


Top man...Drogba enjoyed success with Ivory Coast and Chelsea

DIDIER DROGBA became the first Ivorian to win the African Footballer of the Year award and in the process denied Cameroon's Samuel Eto'o a fourth successive triumph.

The Chelsea striker and Ivory Coast captain received 79 points in the poll of African national team coaches, five more than the Barcelona striker. It was the pair's second successive close tussle for the prize, Eto'o having clinched it by just two points last year. Drogba probably got the nod this time because, unlike Cameroon, Ivory Coast played at the World Cup and also reached the Final of the African Nations Cup, knocking out the Indomitable Lions on the way.

But Eto'o, top scorer at the Egypt tournament and a Champions League winner with Barcelona, arguably still had better credentials than the Chelsea man, despite the latter's championship win in England and prolific second half of the year.

Michael Essien, Drogba's Ghanaian clubmate, finished third for the second successive year.

Mark Gleeson

SENEGAL

Sylva's wasted journey

Senegal's first-choice goalkeeper, Tony Sylva, made the trip all the way back to his homeland for an international from his base in France only to find that the venue had been switched – to Rouen, just down the road from his club, Lille.

The game, on February 7, was originally going to be played in the Senegalese capital, Dakar, against Angola. But then the opponents were changed, to Benin, and so was the venue. However, no one at the federation remembered to inform Sylva until it was too late, a fax arriving at Lille only after the keeper had already left for Africa.

"It's not serious but it is a lack of respect," said Lille coach Claude Puel. "We have informed FIFA of our discontent but unfortunately that is the most we can do."

Khadim Faye played in goal instead as Senegal won 2-1.

Mark Gleeson

Beyond belief...Sylva was not told of venue change

WORLD YOUTH TOURNAMENTS

Egypt and Botswana unopposed

Only Egypt and Botswana have apparently put in bids to host, respectively, the 2009 Under-20 World Youth Cup and the Under-17 World Championship the same year, despite FIFA having earmarked Africa to host both events.

President Sepp Blatter announced the tournaments would be given to African associations as part of his initiative in the continent in the run-up to the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. But by the mid-January deadline for bids, insiders say only the Egyptians and Botswanans had come forward.

Egypt made a disaster of staging the Under-17 event in 1997 – it was alleged that some FIFA officials even had to bribe security staff at the stadium gates to get in to officiate at their own event.

Botswana believe that hosting the tournament will boost their profile ahead of the main World Cup event in neighbouring South Africa.

Mark Gleeson

ROUND-UP

● Frenchman Diego Garzitto quit as coach of ETHIOPIA after just two months in charge, claiming he had not been paid.

● RWANDA'S APR FC won the East and Central African Club Championship, beating Uganda Revenue Authority 2-1 in the Final. Ethiopians St George beat another Rwandan side, Atraco, 2-1 in the third-place play-off.

● Frenchman Patrice Neveu has replaced Dutchman Mark Wotte at Ismaili of EGYPT. Former national team player Ahmed El Kass has been appointed caretaker coach of Alexandria club Olympic after Ashraf Kacem, his 1990 World Cup team-mate, was fired.

● Ladislas Lozano is the new coach of MOROCCAN champions Wydad Casablanca. He replaces Portuguese Jose Romao, who has moved to Saudi Arabia.

● Briton Stephen Constantine, formerly in charge of Nepal and India, has taken the reins in MALAWI.

● In SOUTH AFRICA, Kaizer Chiefs fired German coach Ernst Middendorp after fading out of the title race. Struggling Maritzburg United dismissed Serb Vladislav Heric and re-hired Mlungisi Ngubane. South Africa defender Matthew Booth has signed a new deal at Russian club Kryliya Sovetov.

● Stephen Keshi has returned to the helm of TOGO, whom he steered to qualification for their first World Cup last year.

● Turkish coach Telat Uzim has been fired by GHANA'S Asante Kotoko and replaced by Bashiru Hayford.

Mark Gleeson

Keeping strong...the Tibet goal comes under pressure from Crimea in the ELF Cup

Tibet do the business

THE TIBETAN National Football Association has signed a new shirt sponsorship agreement with Danish sportswear group Hummel that should usher in an era of financial stability for the exiled national team.

The deal was brokered by Danish former player Michael Nybrandt, who helped organise Tibet's first ever game – against Greenland in Denmark in 2001, a 4-1 defeat. Hummel started sponsoring the team at that time and have since sold more than 10,000 Tibetan football shirts worldwide.

Many people have bought them to show support for the Free Tibet movement. China is viewed as an occupying force in the Himalayan kingdom following its invasion in 1950. The TNFA was set up after the Greenland game by Kalsang Dhondup, who fled Tibet as a child after the Chinese invaded.

Nybrandt says: "In terms of finance I believe it's the best contract a non-FIFA team have achieved and it will secure the sustainable development of Tibetan football in the following years.

"I hope it will inspire other non-FIFA teams and initiate a period that will make the associations more sustainable and able to develop their football culture. Non-FIFA teams have been going through a turbulent period in the last five or six years and it is time to move to the next level. When we started the contract negotiation process last year the TNFA received some interesting requests. I got a call from an Italian agent representing a fashion brand who wanted to sign with TNFA, but when I compared the offers there was no doubt Hummel were our first priority, mainly because we wanted to continue our relationship with them.

"It takes years to build up relationships like the one we have with Hummel. Stability is a key factor for us at the moment, but it's interesting we have reached a level where we attract offers from other companies."

Since 1982, Tibetan teams made up of players based in India and Nepal have contested an annual tournament held in honour of the late mother of their spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama. The event is staged in Dharamsala in India, where the Dalai Lama set up a parliament in exile after the Chinese invasion.

The national team is drawn from the Tibetan Diaspora in India and Nepal, although Karma Samdup travelled from England for the Greenland game.

The Tibetans played another game in Europe in 2001, losing 2-1 to Monaco's amateur selection in Germany, but later attempts to travel abroad were cancelled after players were denied visas.

FIFA has no time for the team after being forced into a formal apology to the Chinese government for referring to Tibet as a neighbouring country of China.

In 2003, Tibet played in the Indian Governor's Gold Cup, and last year finally saw some action back in Europe when competing in the Wild Cup, a tournament for non-FIFA teams in Hamburg. Dorjee Tsawa, whose clubs have included St Gallen and Zurich in Switzerland, made his debut in the 5-0 defeat by Gibraltar. Hummel owner Christian Stadil attended the game, having travelled to Germany to start negotiations with Nybrandt and Dhondup.

Last November, Tibet played in the ELF Cup in North Cyprus, losing to Crimea only on a last-minute penalty before being thumped 10-0 by the hosts, the eventual winners.

With the new shirt deal offering the team the prospect of regular income, Nybrandt is working on a match schedule for this year. He says: "We hope the Wild Cup will take place again [Essen in Germany is a possible venue] and we will probably play some other matches in Europe."

Steve Menary

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INTERNATIONALS

UNCAF CUP

In San Salvador, El Salvador

Group 1

Feb 8
Guatemala 1 (Quinonez 29)
Nicaragua 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Pineda (Hnd)
Guatemala: Trigueno - Medina, G Cabrera, Albizuriz, Contreras (De Mata 70), Villatoro (F Martinez 75), Avila (Garcia 55), E Ponciano, Thompson, Quinonez, C Alegria.
Nicaragua: Espinoza - Mejia, Aviles, Corrales (D Solorzano 46), Martin, Alonso, Masis, Franklin Lopez, Wilson (Martinez 59), Vanegas (Reyes 46), Palacios.

Feb 8
El Salvador 2 (Diaz 25, Quintanilla 55)
Belize 1 (Benavides 64)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Quesada (CR)
El Salvador: J M Gonzalez - Anaya, V Velasquez, J Torres, Merino, Erazo, Diaz (Avalos 85), Murgas, Pacheco, W Torres, Quintanilla (Alas 90).
Belize: Orio - Simpson, M Leslie, Haylock (Morales 70), McCauley, Roches (Benavides 59), Trapp (Gilharry 60), Linares, O Lyons, Lennen, Eiley.

Feb 10
Belize 0
Guatemala 1 (G Cabrera 8)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Vidal (Pan)
Belize: Orio - Simpson, Gilharry, M Leslie, McCauley (Castillo 62), Roches (Benavides 46), Trapp (Morales 41), O Lyons, Lennen, Smith, Eiley. *Sent off: O Lyons 62min.*
Guatemala: Trigueno - Noriega (Villatoro 69), Medina, G Cabrera, Albizuriz, Contreras, Avila, E Ponciano, Thompson, De Mata (Quinonez 76), C Alegria (F Martinez 46).

Feb 10
El Salvador 2 (Quintanilla 16, pen 64)
Nicaragua 1 (Wilson 53)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Arredondo (Mex)
El Salvador: Gomez - Anaya, V Velasquez (Alas 55), J Torres, Merino, Diaz, Murgas, Pacheco, W Torres (Salazar 46), Quintanilla, Erazo (Jose Martinez 77).
Nicaragua: Espinoza - Mejia, Aviles, Martin, Alonso, Masis, Wilson, Busto (D Solorzano 81), West (Martinez 57), Sanchez (Reyes 69), Quintanilla.

Feb 12
Nicaragua 4 (Palacios 12, 20, 68, Busto 28)
Belize 2 (McCauley 25, 34)
HT: 3-2. **Ref:** Quesada (CR)
Nicaragua: Espinoza - Mejia, Aviles, Martin, Alonso, Masis, Wilson (Martinez 76), Quintanilla (D Solorzano 32), Reyes (West 46), Busto, Palacios.
Belize: Orio - Castillo, M Leslie (Simpson 82), McCauley (Roches 69), Benavides, Linares, Morales, Lennen, Smith, Eiley, Gaynair (Allen 86).

Feb 12
El Salvador 0
Guatemala 0
Ref: Archundia (Mex)
El Salvador: Gomez - Salazar, Anaya, V Velasquez, Merino, Erazo, Diaz, Alas (Avalos 87), Murgas, Pacheco, Quintanilla.
Guatemala: Trigueno - Noriega, Flores, Medina, G Cabrera, Contreras (C Alegria 46), Villatoro (E Ponciano 81), Avila (Garcia 62), N Martinez, De Mata, Quinonez. *Sent off: Noriega 80min.*

GROUP 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
El Salvador	3	2	1	0	4	2	7
Guatemala	3	2	1	0	2	0	7
Nicaragua	3	1	0	2	5	5	3
Belize	3	0	0	3	3	7	0

Group 2

Feb 9
Costa Rica 3 (R Fonseca 4, 70, L Gonzalez 46)
Honduras 1 (E Martinez 59)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Archundia (Mex)
Costa Rica: Porras - V Cordero, J Drummond, Umana, Wallace (Benneth 64), L Gonzalez, Rodriguez, Barrantes (Bernard 83), Centeno (Montoya 72), A Solis, R Fonseca.
Honduras: Coello - Boniek, Beata, E Izaguirre (Vallecillo 68), Figueroa, Mendoza, E Martinez, W Palacios, Ferrera (Claros 65), Jairo Martinez, Velasquez (S Martinez 53).

Feb 11
Honduras 1 (Guardia og 25)
Panama 1 (Rivera 78)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Aguilar (ElS)
Honduras: Coello - Figueroa, Vallecillo, Jairo Martinez, Velasquez, Claros (Mendoza 75), Ferrera, Boniek, Hernandez (E Izaguirre 64), Castro (E Martinez 30), Bernardez.
Panama: McFarlane - Rivera, Escobar, Solanilla, Phillips (Arosemena 57), Guardia (Blanco 34), Tejada, Canales (G Torres 67), Mitre, A Henriquez, Baloy.

Feb 13
Panama 1 (Blanco 86)
Costa Rica 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Batres (Gtm)
Panama: Penedo - Rivera (L Henriquez 63), J Torres, R Torres, Perez, Blanco, G Torres (Arosemena 62), Herrera (Escobar 78), Canales, A Henriquez, Baloy.
Costa Rica: Alfaro - J Drummond, Fernandez, R Fonseca (A Solis 58), Wong, Furtado, L Gonzalez (Barrantes 72), Hernandez, Montoya, Bernard (Centeno 77), Benneth.

GROUP 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Panama	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Costa Rica	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
Honduras	2	0	1	1	2	4	1

Fifth-place play-off

Feb 15
Nicaragua 1 (Wilson 31)
Honduras 9 (Jairo Martinez 4, Velasquez 6, 27, 38, pen 39, S Martinez 69, 81, 86, Mejia 77)
HT: 1-5. **Ref:** Aguilar (ElS)
Nicaragua: Espinoza - Mejia (Franklin Lopez 46), Aviles, Martin (Sanchez 46), Alonso, Masis, Wilson, Quintanilla, Busto, West (Reyes 20), Palacios.
Honduras: Escobar - Figueroa, J Izaguirre, W Palacios, Jairo Martinez (Mejia 46), Velasquez (S Martinez 68), Claros, Boniek, Castro, E Izaguirre, Beata (Bernardez 72).

Semi-finals

Feb 16
Panama 2 (Phillips 52, Baloy pen 90)
Guatemala 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Arredondo (Mex)
Panama: McFarlane - Rivera, R Torres, Perez, Blanco, G Torres (Herrera 64), Escobar (Guardia 53), L Henriquez, Canales (Phillips 46), A Henriquez, Baloy. *Sent off: L Henriquez 52min.*
Guatemala: Trigueno - Flores, G Cabrera, Albizuriz, Contreras (Villatoro 46), E Ponciano, Avila (Ruiz 72), Thompson (F Martinez 64), De Mata, Quinonez, C Alegria. *Sent off: Flores 78min.*

Feb 16
El Salvador 0
Costa Rica 2 (Wallace 10, R Fonseca 12)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Archundia (Mex)
El Salvador: Gomez - Salazar, Anaya, V Velasquez, Merino, Erazo (Diaz 55), Alas (Jose Martinez 15), Murgas, Pacheco, W Torres (Galdamez 25), Quintanilla.
Costa Rica: Porras - J Drummond, V Cordero, Umana, Barrantes, R Fonseca, A Solis (Hernandez 72), Centeno (Bernard 80), L Gonzalez (Benneth 66), Rodriguez, Wallace.

Third-place play-off

Feb 18
El Salvador 0
Guatemala 1 (Albizuriz 82)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Quesada (CR)
El Salvador: J M Gonzalez - Salazar (Guevara 22), Anaya, V Velasquez, Pacheco, Merino (Galdamez 81), Salamanca, Alas, Quintanilla, Jose Martinez, Erazo (Diaz 76). *Sent off: Anaya 89min.*
Guatemala: Molina - N Martinez, Medina, G Cabrera, Albizuriz, De Mata (Garcia 67), Villatoro, Thompson, Noriega, C Alegria (F Martinez 77), Avila.

Final

Feb 18
Costa Rica 1 (Bernard 85)
Panama 1 (Tejada 36)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Batres (Gtm)
Costa Rica 4-1 on pens
Costa Rica: Porras - J Drummond, V Cordero (Montoya 75), Umana, Barrantes, R Fonseca, Centeno, L Gonzalez, Rodriguez (Hernandez 67), Wallace, A Solis (Bernard 71).
Panama: Penedo - Rivera, J Torres, R Torres, Baloy, Perez, Blanco, Phillips (Escobar 90), A Henriquez, Tejada (Arosemena 66), Mitre (Herrera 60).

The UNCAF Cup doubled as the Central American qualifying campaign for the 2007 Gold Cup. Costa Rica, Panama, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras qualified for the Gold Cup finals

GOLD CUP

Finals draw

Group A
Canada
Costa Rica
Guadeloupe
Haiti

Group B
El Salvador
Guatemala
Trinidad & Tobago
United States

Group C
Cuba
Honduras
Mexico
Panama

Top two in each group and the two third-placed sides with the best record qualify for quarter-finals

Tournament to be staged in the United States from June 6 to 24

FRIENDLIES

Tuesday, February 13
Feb 13 - Maseru
Lesotho 0
Swaziland 1 (Msimango 5)
HT: 0-1

Thursday, February 22
Feb 22 - Cotonou
Benin 0
Chad 1 (Brahim 53)
HT: 0-0

Wednesday, February 28
Feb 28 - San Diego, USA
Mexico 3 (Guardado 25, Arce 34, Blanco pen 47)
Venezuela 1 (Arismendi 82)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 63,328. **Ref:** Stott (USA)
Mexico: Ochoa - J A Castro (I Castro 65), Magallon, Beltran, R Morales, G Galindo (Lopez 37), Torrado (Manuel Perez 71), Arce (Cacho 46), Guardado, Blanco (Palencia 83), Fonseca (J C Medina 46).
Venezuela: Sanhouse - Vallenilla (Lucena 83), Rey, Vizcarrondo, Rojas, M Mea Vitali (Vielma 46), Villafraz (Guerra 46), Rouga, G Perez (Fernandez 46), Fedor (Arismendi 69), Moran (Hernandez 49).

EURO 2008 QUALIFIERS

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Finland	5	3	2	0	7	2	11
Serbia	4	3	1	0	6	1	10
Poland	5	3	1	1	6	5	10
Portugal	4	2	1	1	8	3	7
Belgium	5	2	1	2	4	2	7
Kazakhstan	5	0	2	3	1	7	2
Armenia	4	0	1	3	0	5	1
Azerbaijan	4	0	1	3	1	8	1

16.08.06 Belgium-Kazakhstan 0-0
02.09.06 Poland-Finland 1-3
02.09.06 Serbia-Azerbaijan 1-0
06.09.06 Armenia-Belgium 0-1
06.09.06 Azerbaijan-Kazakhstan 1-1
06.09.06 Finland-Portugal 1-1
06.09.06 Poland-Serbia 1-1
07.10.06 Armenia-Finland 0-0
07.10.06 Kazakhstan-Poland 0-1
07.10.06 Portugal-Azerbaijan 3-0
07.10.06 Serbia-Belgium 1-0
11.10.06 Belgium-Azerbaijan 3-0
11.10.06 Kazakhstan-Finland 0-2
11.10.06 Poland-Portugal 2-1
11.10.06 Serbia-Armenia 3-0
15.11.06 Belgium-Poland 0-1
15.11.06 Finland-Armenia 1-0
15.11.06 Portugal-Kazakhstan 3-0
24.03.07 Kazakhstan-Serbia
24.03.07 Poland-Azerbaijan
24.03.07 Portugal-Belgium
28.03.07 Azerbaijan-Finland
28.03.07 Poland-Armenia
28.03.07 Serbia-Portugal
02.06.07 Azerbaijan-Poland
02.06.07 Belgium-Portugal
02.06.07 Finland-Serbia
02.06.07 Kazakhstan-Armenia
06.06.07 Armenia-Poland
06.06.07 Finland-Belgium
06.06.07 Kazakhstan-Azerbaijan
22.08.07 Armenia-Portugal
22.08.07 Belgium-Serbia
22.08.07 Finland-Kazakhstan
08.09.07 Azerbaijan-Armenia
08.09.07 Portugal-Poland
08.09.07 Serbia-Finland
12.09.07 Armenia-Azerbaijan
12.09.07 Finland-Poland
12.09.07 Kazakhstan-Belgium
12.09.07 Portugal-Serbia
13.10.07 Armenia-Serbia
13.10.07 Azerbaijan-Portugal
13.10.07 Belgium-Finland
13.10.07 Poland-Kazakhstan
17.10.07 Azerbaijan-Serbia
17.10.07 Belgium-Armenia
17.10.07 Kazakhstan-Portugal
17.11.07 Finland-Azerbaijan
17.11.07 Poland-Belgium
17.11.07 Portugal-Armenia
17.11.07 Serbia-Kazakhstan
21.11.07 Armenia-Kazakhstan
21.11.07 Azerbaijan-Belgium
21.11.07 Portugal-Finland
21.11.07 Serbia-Poland

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Scotland	4	3	0	1	9	3	9
France	4	3	0	1	11	2	9
Italy	4	2	1	1	7	5	7
Ukraine	3	2	0	1	5	4	6
Lithuania	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Georgia	4	1	0	3	9	9	3
Faroe Islands	4	0	0	4	0	18	0

16.08.06 Faroe Islands-Georgia 0-6
02.09.06 Georgia-France 0-3
02.09.06 Italy-Lithuania 1-1
02.09.06 Scotland-Faroe Islands 6-0
06.09.06 France-Italy 3-1
06.09.06 Lithuania-Scotland 1-2
06.09.06 Ukraine-Georgia 3-2
07.10.06 Faroe Islands-Lithuania 0-1
07.10.06 Italy-Ukraine 2-0
07.10.06 Scotland-France 1-0
11.10.06 France-Faroe Islands 5-0
11.10.06 Georgia-Italy 1-3
11.10.06 Ukraine-Scotland 2-0
24.03.07 Faroe Islands-Ukraine
24.03.07 Lithuania-France
24.03.07 Scotland-Georgia
28.03.07 Georgia-Faroe Islands
28.03.07 Italy-Scotland
28.03.07 Ukraine-Lithuania
02.06.07 France-Ukraine
02.06.07 Lithuania-Georgia
02.06.07 Faroe Islands-Italy
06.06.07 Faroe Islands-Scotland
06.06.07 France-Georgia
06.06.07 Lithuania-Italy
08.09.07 Georgia-Ukraine
08.09.07 Italy-France
08.09.07 Scotland-Lithuania
12.09.07 France-Scotland
12.09.07 Lithuania-Faroe Islands
12.09.07 Ukraine-Italy
13.10.07 Faroe Islands-France
13.10.07 Italy-Georgia
13.10.07 Scotland-Ukraine
17.10.07 France-Lithuania
17.10.07 Georgia-Scotland
17.10.07 Ukraine-Faroe Islands
17.11.07 Lithuania-Ukraine
17.11.07 Scotland-Italy
21.11.07 Georgia-Lithuania
21.11.07 Italy-Faroe Islands
21.11.07 Ukraine-France

Group C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Turkey	3	3	0	0	8	0	9
Greece	3	3	0	0	6	0	9
Norway	3	2	0	1	6	2	6
Bosnia-Herz	4	1	1	2	8	11	4
Malta	3	1	0	2	4	8	3
Hungary	4	1	0	3	5	8	3
Moldova	4	0	1	3	2	10	1

02.09.06 Hungary-Norway 1-4
02.09.06 Malta-Bosnia-Herz 2-5
02.09.06 Moldova-Greece 0-1
06.09.06 Bosnia-Herz-Hungary 1-3
06.09.06 Norway-Moldova 2-0
06.09.06 Turkey-Malta 2-0
07.10.06 Greece-Norway 1-0
07.10.06 Hungary-Turkey 0-1
07.10.06 Moldova-Bosnia-Herz 2-2
11.10.06 Bosnia-Herz-Greece 0-4
11.10.06 Malta-Hungary 2-1
11.10.06 Turkey-Moldova 5-0
24.03.07 Greece-Turkey
24.03.07 Moldova-Malta
24.03.07 Norway-Bosnia-Herz
28.03.07 Hungary-Moldova
28.03.07 Malta-Greece
28.03.07 Turkey-Norway
02.06.07 Bosnia-Herz-Turkey
02.06.07 Greece-Hungary
02.06.07 Norway-Malta
06.06.07 Greece-Moldova
06.06.07 Bosnia-Herz-Malta
06.06.07 Norway-Hungary
08.09.07 Hungary-Bosnia-Herz
08.09.07 Malta-Turkey
08.09.07 Moldova-Norway
12.09.07 Bosnia-Herz-Moldova
12.09.07 Norway-Greece
12.09.07 Turkey-Hungary
13.10.07 Greece-Bosnia-Herz
13.10.07 Hungary-Malta
13.10.07 Moldova-Turkey
17.10.07 Bosnia-Herz-Norway
17.10.07 Malta-Moldova
17.10.07 Turkey-Greece
17.11.07 Greece-Malta
17.11.07 Moldova-Hungary
17.11.07 Norway-Turkey
21.11.07 Hungary-Greece
21.11.07 Malta-Norway
21.11.07 Turkey-Bosnia-Herz

Group D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Germany	4	3	1	0	19	2	10
Czech Rep	4	3	1	0	13	2	10
Rep Ireland	5	2	1	2	10	8	7
Slovakia	4	2	0	2	12	9	6
Cyprus	4	1	1	2	8	12	4
Wales	3	1	0	2	5	8	3
San Marino	4	0	0	4	1	27	0

02.09.06 Czech Republic-Wales 2-1
02.09.06 Germany-Rep Ireland 1-0
02.09.06 Slovakia-Cyprus 6-1
06.09.06 San Marino-Germany 0-13
06.09.06 Slovakia-Czech Republic 0-3
07.10.06 Cyprus-Rep Ireland 5-2
07.10.06 Czech Republic-San Marino 7-0
07.10.06 Wales-Slovakia 1-5
11.10.06 Rep Ireland-Czech Republic 1-1
11.10.06 Slovakia-Germany 1-4
11.10.06 Wales-Cyprus 3-1
15.11.06 Cyprus-Germany 1-1
15.11.06 Rep Ireland-San Marino 5-0
07.02.07 San Marino-Rep Ireland 1-2
24.03.07 Cyprus-Slovakia
24.03.07 Czech Republic-Germany
24.03.07 Rep Ireland-Wales
28.03.07 Czech Republic-Cyprus
28.03.07 Rep Ireland-Slovakia
28.03.07 Wales-San Marino
02.06.07 Germany-San Marino
02.06.07 Wales-Czech Republic
06.06.07 Germany-Slovakia
22.08.07 San Marino-Cyprus
08.09.07 San Marino-Czech Republic
08.09.07 Slovakia-Rep Ireland
08.09.07 Wales-Germany
12.09.07 Cyprus-San Marino
12.09.07 Czech Republic-Rep Ireland
12.09.07 Slovakia-Wales
13.10.07 Cyprus-Wales
13.10.07 Rep Ireland-Germany
13.10.07 Slovakia-San Marino
17.10.07 Germany-Czech Republic
17.10.07 Rep Ireland-Cyprus
17.10.07 San Marino-Wales
17.11.07 Czech Republic-Slovakia
17.11.07 Germany-Cyprus
17.11.07 Wales-Rep Ireland
21.11.07 Cyprus-Czech Republic
21.11.07 Germany-Wales
21.11.07 San Marino-Slovakia

Group E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Croatia	4	3	1	0	13	3	10
Russia	4	2	2	0	5	1	8
England	4	2	1	1	6	2	7
Macedonia	5	2	1	2	4	3	7
Israel	4	2	1	1	9	6	7
Estonia	3	0	0	3	0	4	0
Andorra	4	0	0	4	1	19	0

16.08.06 Estonia-Macedonia 0-1
02.09.06 England-Andorra 5-0
02.09.06 Estonia-Israel 0-1
06.09.06 Israel-Andorra 4-1
06.09.06 Macedonia-England 0-1
06.09.06 Russia-Croatia 0-0
07.10.06 Croatia-Andorra 7-0
07.10.06 England-Macedonia 0-0
07.10.06 Russia-Israel 1-1
11.10.06 Andorra-Macedonia 0-3
11.10.06 Croatia-England 2-0
11.10.06 Russia-Estonia 2-0
15.11.06 Israel-Croatia 3-4
15.11.06 Macedonia-Russia 0-2
24.03.07 Croatia-Macedonia
24.03.07 Estonia-Russia
24.03.07 Israel-England
28.03.07 Andorra-England
28.03.07 Israel-Estonia
02.06.07 Estonia-Croatia
02.06.07 Macedonia-Israel
02.06.07 Russia-Andorra
06.06.07 Andorra-Israel
06.06.07 Croatia-Russia
06.06.07 Estonia-England
22.08.07 Estonia-Andorra
08.09.07 Croatia-Estonia
08.09.07 England-Israel
08.09.07 Russia-Macedonia
12.09.07 Andorra-Croatia
12.09.07 England-Russia
12.09.07 Macedonia-Estonia
13.10.07 England-Estonia
17.10.07 Croatia-Israel
17.10.07 Macedonia-Andorra
17.10.07 Russia-England
17.11.07 Andorra-Estonia
17.11.07 Israel-Russia
17.11.07 Macedonia-Croatia
21.11.07 Andorra-Russia
21.11.07 England-Croatia
21.11.07 Israel-Macedonia

Group F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sweden	4	4	0	0	8	2	12
Denmark	3	2	1	0	6	0	7
N Ireland	4	2	1	1	4	5	7
Latvia	3	1	0	2	4	2	3
Spain	3	1	0	2	6	5	3
Iceland	4	1	0	3	4	8	3
Liechtenstein	3	0	0	3	1	11	0

02.09.06 Latvia-Sweden 0-1
02.09.06 Northern Ireland-Iceland 0-3
02.09.06 Spain-Liechtenstein 4-0
06.09.06 Iceland-Denmark 0-2
06.09.06 Northern Ireland-Spain 3-2
06.09.06 Sweden-Liechtenstein 3-1
07.10.06 Denmark-Northern Ireland 0-0
07.10.06 Latvia-Iceland 4-0
07.10.06 Sweden-Spain 2-0
11.10.06 Iceland-Sweden 1-2
11.10.06 Liechtenstein-Denmark 0-4
11.10.06 Northern Ireland-Latvia 1-0
24.03.07 Liechtenstein-N Ireland
24.03.07 Spain-Denmark
28.03.07 Liechtenstein-Latvia
28.03.07 Northern Ireland-Sweden
28.03.07 Spain-Iceland
02.06.07 Denmark-Sweden
02.06.07 Iceland-Liechtenstein
02.06.07 Latvia-Spain
06.06.07 Latvia-Denmark
06.06.07 Liechtenstein-Spain
06.06.07 Sweden-Iceland
22.08.07 N Ireland-Liechtenstein
08.09.07 Iceland-Spain
08.09.07 Latvia-Northern Ireland
08.09.07 Sweden-Denmark
12.09.07 Denmark-Liechtenstein
12.09.07 Iceland-Northern Ireland
12.09.07 Spain-Latvia
13.10.07 Denmark-Spain
13.10.07 Iceland-Latvia
13.10.07 Liechtenstein-Sweden
17.10.07 Denmark-Latvia
17.10.07 Liechtenstein-Iceland
17.10.07 Sweden-Northern Ireland
17.11.07 Latvia-Liechtenstein
17.11.07 Northern Ireland-Denmark
17.11.07 Spain-Sweden
21.11.07 Denmark-Iceland
21.11.07 Spain-Northern Ireland
21.11.07 Sweden-Latvia

Group G

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Holland	4	3	1	0	7	2	10
Bulgaria	4	2	2	0	7	3	8
Romania	3	2	1	0	7	3	7
Belarus	4	1	1	2	7	10	4
Slovenia	3	1	0	2	4	7	3
Albania	3	0	1	2	3	6	1
Luxembourg	3	0	0	3	0	4	0

02.09.06 Belarus-Albania 2-2
02.09.06 Luxembourg-Holland 0-1
02.09.06 Romania-Bulgaria 2-2
06.09.06 Albania-Romania 0-2
06.09.06 Bulgaria-Slovenia 3-0
06.09.06 Holland-Belarus 3-0
07.10.06 Bulgaria-Holland 1-1
07.10.06 Romania-Belarus 3-1
07.10.06 Slovenia-Luxembourg 2-0
11.10.06 Belarus-Slovenia 4-2
11.10.06 Holland-Albania 2-1
11.10.06 Luxembourg-Bulgaria 0-1
24.03.07 Albania-Slovenia
24.03.07 Holland-Romania
24.03.07 Luxembourg-Belarus
28.03.07 Bulgaria-Albania
28.03.07 Romania-Luxembourg
28.03.07 Slovenia-Holland
02.06.07 Albania-Luxembourg
02.06.07 Belarus-Bulgaria
02.06.07 Slovenia-Romania
06.06.07 Bulgaria-Belarus
06.06.07 Luxembourg-Albania
06.06.07 Romania-Slovenia
08.09.07 Belarus-Romania
08.09.07 Holland-Bulgaria
08.09.07 Luxembourg-Slovenia
12.09.07 Albania-Holland
12.09.07 Bulgaria-Luxembourg
12.09.07 Slovenia-Belarus
13.10.07 Belarus-Luxembourg
13.10.07 Romania-Holland
13.10.07 Slovenia-Albania
17.10.07 Albania-Bulgaria
17.10.07 Holland-Slovenia
17.10.07 Luxembourg-Romania
17.11.07 Albania-Belarus
17.11.07 Bulgaria-Romania
17.11.07 Holland-Luxembourg
21.11.07 Belarus-Holland
21.11.07 Romania-Albania
21.11.07 Slovenia-Bulgaria

Top two in each group qualify for finals. Austria and Switzerland qualify automatically as co-hosts. Finals tournament: June 7-29, 2008

2008 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALIFIERS

Group 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ivory Coast	1	1	0	0	5	0	3
Gabon	2	1	0	1	4	5	3
Madagascar	1	0	0	1	0	4	0

Djibouti withdrew

02.09.06 Gabon-Madagascar 4-0
08.10.06 Ivory Coast-Gabon 5-0
24.03.07 Madagascar-Ivory Coast
02.06.07 Ivory Coast-Madagascar
16.06.07 Madagascar-Gabon
08.09.07 Gabon-Ivory Coast

Group 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Egypt	2	1	1	0	4	1	4
Mauritania	2	1	0	1	5	3	3
Burundi	2	1	0	1	4	5	3
Botswana	2	0	1	1	0	4	1

02.09.06 Egypt-Burundi 4-1
02.09.06 Mauritania-Botswana 4-0
07.10.06 Botswana-Egypt 0-0
08.10.06 Burundi-Mauritania 3-1
24.03.07 Botswana-Burundi
24.03.07 Egypt-Mauritania
02.06.07 Burundi-Botswana
02.06.07 Mauritania-Egypt
16.06.07 Botswana-Mauritania
16.06.07 Burundi-Egypt
08.09.07 Egypt-Botswana
08.09.07 Mauritania-Burundi

Group 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nigeria	2	2	0	0	3	0	6
Uganda	2	1	1	0	3	0	4
Niger	2	0	1	1	0	2	1
Lesotho	2	0	0	2	0	4	0

02.09.06 Nigeria-Niger 2-0
02.09.06 Uganda-Lesotho 3-0
08.10.06 Lesotho-Nigeria 0-1
08.10.06 Niger-Uganda 0-0
24.03.07 Lesotho-Niger
24.03.07 Nigeria-Uganda
02.06.07 Niger-Lesotho
02.06.07 Uganda-Nigeria
16.06.07 Lesotho-Uganda
16.06.07 Niger-Nigeria
08.09.07 Nigeria-Lesotho
08.09.07 Uganda-Niger

Group 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tunisia	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Sudan	2	1	0	1	3	1	3
Seychelles	2	1	0	1	2	4	3
Mauritius	2	0	1	1	1	2	1

03.09.06 Mauritius-Tunisia 0-0
03.09.06 Sudan-Seychelles 3-0
07.10.06 Seychelles-Mauritius 2-1
07.10.06 Tunisia-Sudan 1-0
24.03.07 Mauritius-Sudan
24.03.07 Seychelles-Tunisia
02.06.07 Sudan-Mauritius
02.06.07 Tunisia-Seychelles
16.06.07 Seychelles-Sudan
16.06.07 Tunisia-Mauritius
08.09.07 Mauritius-Seychelles
08.09.07 Sudan-Tunisia

Group 5

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cameroon	2	2	0	0	6	0	6
Liberia	2	1	0	1	4	4	3
Eq Guinea	2	1	0	1	2	4	3
Rwanda	2	0	0	2	2	6	0

03.09.06 Equatorial Guinea-Liberia 2-1
03.09.06 Rwanda-Cameroon 0-3
07.10.06 Cameroon-Equatorial Guinea 3-0
08.10.06 Liberia-Rwanda 3-2
24.03.07 Cameroon-Liberia
24.03.07 Equatorial Guinea-Rwanda
02.06.07 Liberia-Cameroon
02.06.07 Rwanda-Equatorial Guinea
16.06.07 Cameroon-Rwanda
16.06.07 Liberia-Equatorial Guinea
08.09.07 Equatorial Guinea-Cameroon
08.09.07 Rwanda-Liberia

Group 6

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Angola	2	2	0	0	5	1	6
Eritrea	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Swaziland	2	0	1	1	0	2	1
Kenya	2	0	0	2	2	5	0

02.09.06 Kenya-Eritrea 1-2
03.09.06 Swaziland-Angola 0-2

08.10.06 Angola-Kenya 3-1
08.10.06 Eritrea-Swaziland 0-0
24.03.07 Angola-Eritrea
24.03.07 Kenya-Swaziland
02.06.07 Eritrea-Angola
02.06.07 Swaziland-Kenya
16.06.07 Angola-Swaziland
16.06.07 Eritrea-Kenya
08.09.07 Kenya-Angola
08.09.07 Swaziland-Eritrea

Group 7

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tanzania	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Senegal	2	1	0	1	2	1	3
Burkina Faso	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Mozambique	2	0	1	1	0	2	1

02.09.06 Senegal-Mozambique 2-0
02.09.06 Tanzania-Burkina Faso 2-1
07.10.06 Burkina Faso-Senegal 1-0
08.10.06 Mozambique-Tanzania 0-0
24.03.07 Burkina Faso-Mozambique
24.03.07 Senegal-Tanzania
02.06.07 Mozambique-Burkina Faso
02.06.07 Tanzania-Senegal
16.06.07 Burkina Faso-Tanzania
16.06.07 Mozambique-Senegal
08.09.07 Senegal-Burkina Faso
08.09.07 Tanzania-Mozambique

Group 8

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Algeria	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Gambia	2	1	0	1	2	1	3
Cape Verde Is	2	1	0	1	1	2	3
Guinea	2	0	1	1	0	1	1

03.09.06 Gambia-Cape Verde Islands 2-0
03.09.06 Guinea-Algeria 0-0
07.10.06 Algeria-Gambia 1-0
08.10.06 Cape Verde Islands-Guinea 1-0
24.03.07 Algeria-Cape Verde Islands
24.03.07 Gambia-Guinea
02.06.07 Cape Verde Islands-Algeria
02.06.07 Guinea-Gambia
16.06.07 Algeria-Guinea
16.06.07 Cape Verde Islands-Gambia
08.09.07 Gambia-Algeria
08.09.07 Guinea-Cape Verde Islands

Group 9

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mali	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Benin	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
Togo	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Sierra Leone	2	0	1	1	0	2	1

03.09.06 Sierra Leone-Mali 0-0
03.09.06 Togo-Benin 2-1
08.10.06 Benin-Sierra Leone 2-0
08.10.06 Mali-Togo 1-0
24.03.07 Mali-Benin
24.03.07 Togo-Sierra Leone
02.06.07 Benin-Mali
02.06.07 Sierra Leone-Togo
16.06.07 Benin-Togo
16.06.07 Mali-Sierra Leone
08.09.07 Sierra Leone-Benin
08.09.07 Togo-Mali

Group 10

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
DR Congo	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
Namibia	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
Ethiopia	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Libya	2	0	1	1	1	2	1

03.09.06 DR Congo-Namibia 3-2
03.09.06 Ethiopia-Libya 1-0
07.10.06 Namibia-Ethiopia 1-0
08.10.06 Libya-DR Congo 1-1
24.03.07 DR Congo-Ethiopia
24.03.07 Libya-Namibia
02.06.07 Ethiopia-DR Congo
02.06.07 Namibia-Libya
16.06.07 Libya-Ethiopia
16.06.07 Namibia-DR Congo
08.09.07 DR Congo-Libya
08.09.07 Ethiopia-Namibia

Group 11

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Congo	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
South Africa	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Zambia	2	1	0	1	2	1	3
Chad	2	0	0	2	1	5	0

02.09.06 South Africa-Congo 0-0
03.09.06 Chad-Zambia 0-2
07.10.06 Congo-Chad 3-0
07.10.06 Zambia-South Africa 0-1
24.03.07 Chad-South Africa
24.03.07 Congo-Zambia
02.06.07 South Africa-Chad
02.06.07 Zambia-Congo
16.06.07 Congo-South Africa
16.06.07 Zambia-Chad
08.09.07 Chad-Congo
08.09.07 South Africa-Zambia

Group 12

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Morocco	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Malawi	2	1	0	1	1	2	3
Zimbabwe	1	0	0	1	0	1	0

02.09.06 Morocco-Malawi 2-0
07.10.06 Malawi-Zimbabwe 1-0
24.03.07 Zimbabwe-Morocco
02.06.07 Morocco-Zimbabwe
16.06.07 Malawi-Morocco
08.09.07 Zimbabwe-Malawi

Group winners and the three best runners-up qualify for finals. Ghana qualify automatically as hosts. Finals tournament: January 20-February 10, 2008

2007 COPA AMERICA

In Venezuela

Match schedule

Group A
June 26 Venezuela-Bolivia (San Cristobal)
June 26 Uruguay-Peru (Merida)
June 30 Bolivia-Uruguay (San Cristobal)
June 30 Venezuela-Peru (San Cristobal)
July 3 Peru-Bolivia (Merida)
July 3 Venezuela-Uruguay (Merida)

Group B
June 27 Ecuador-Chile (Puerto Ordaz)
June 27 Brazil-Mexico (Puerto Ordaz)
July 1 Mexico-Ecuador (Maturin)
July 1 Brazil-Chile (Maturin)
July 4 Mexico-Chile (Puerto La Cruz)
July 4 Brazil-Ecuador (Puerto La Cruz)

Group C
June 28 Paraguay-Colombia (Maracaibo)
June 28 Argentina-United States (Maracaibo)
July 2 United States-Paraguay (Barinas)
July 2 Argentina-Colombia (Maracaibo)
July 5 Colombia-United States (Barquisimento)
July 5 Argentina-Paraguay (Barquisimento)

Top two in each group and the two third-placed sides with the best record qualify for quarter-finals

CLUB FOOTBALL EUROPE

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st knockout round, 1st legs

Feb 20
Celtic (Sco) 0
Milan (Ita) 0
Att: 58,785. **Ref:** Hauge (Nor)
Celtic: Boruc - Wilson, McManus, O'Dea, Naylor, Nakamura, Sno, Lennon (Gravesen 81), McGeady, Vennegoor of Hesselink, Miller (Jarosik 63).
Milan: Kalac - Oddo, Kaladze (Bonera 63), Maldini, Jankulovski, Gourcuff, Gattuso, Pirlo, Ambrosini, Kaka, Gilardino (Ricardo Oliveira 77).

Feb 20
Lille (Fra) 0
Manchester United (Eng) 1 (Giggs 83)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 40,000. **Ref:** Braamhaar (Hol)
Lille: Sylva - Chalme, Plestan, Tavlaridis, Tafforeau, Bodmer, Makoun, Debuchy, Fauvergue (Cabaye 57), Obraniak (Bastos 90), Odemwingie (Audel 75).
Man Utd: Van der Sar - Neville, Ferdinand, Vidic, Evra, Cristiano Ronaldo (Saha 67), Carrick, Scholes (O'Shea 90), Giggs, Rooney, Larsson.

Feb 20
PSV Eindhoven (Hol) 1 (Mendez 61)
Arsenal (Eng) 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 35,000. **Ref:** Ovrebo (Nor)
PSV: Gomes - Kromkamp, Alex, Da Costa (Sun 66), Salcido, Culina, Simons, Cocu, Mendez, Kone, Diego Tardelli (Vayrynen 75).
Arsenal: Lehmann - Gallas, Toure, Senderos, Clichy, Hleb (Julio Baptista 76), Gilberto Silva, Fabregas, Rosicky, Henry, Adebayor.

Feb 20
Real Madrid (Spa) 3 (Raul 10, 28, Van Nistelrooy 34)
Bayern Munich (Ger) 2 (Lucio 23, Van Bommel 88)
HT: 3-1. **Att:** 75,000. **Ref:** De Bleckere (Blg)
Real Madrid: Casillas - Torres, Cannavaro, Ivan Helguera, Roberto Carlos (Raul Bravo 59), Beckham, Gago, Guti, Raul, Higuain (Robinho 53), Van Nistelrooy.
Bayern: Kahn - Sagnol, Lucio, Van Buyten, Lahm, Van Bommel, Hargreaves, Demichelis (Salihamidzic 46), Schweinsteiger (Scholl 79), Makaay, Podolski (Pizarro 61).

Feb 21
Barcelona (Spa) 1 (Deco 14)
Liverpool (Eng) 2 (Bellamy 43, Riise 74)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 88,000. **Ref:** Vassaras (Gre)
Barcelona: Valdes - Belletti, Marquez, Puyol, Zambrotta, Xavi (Giuly 65), Motta (Iniesta 54), Deco, Messi, Saviola (Gudjohnsen 82), Ronaldinho.
Liverpool: Reina - Arbeloa, Carragher, Agger, Riise, Finnan, Sissoko (Zenden 84), Gerrard, Xabi Alonso, Bellamy (Pennant 80), Kuijt (Crouch 90).

Feb 21
Internazionale (Ita) 2 (Cambiasso 29, Maicon 76)
Valencia (Spa) 2 (Villa 64, Silva 86)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 22,608. **Ref:** Hansson (Swe)
Inter: Julio Cesar - Maicon, Cordoba, Materazzi, Burdisso, Stankovic, Cambiasso (Dacourt 31), Figo (Solari 89), Zanetti, Crespo (Cruz 68), Ibrahimovic.
Valencia: Canizares - Miguel, Ayala, Albiol, Moretti, Angulo (Joaquin 83), Marchena, Albelda, Silva (Jorge Lopez 90), Morientes (Hugo Viana 76), Villa.

Feb 21
FC Porto (Por) 1 (Raul Meireles 12)
Chelsea (Eng) 1 (Shevchenko 16)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 49,000. **Ref:** Busacca (Swi)
Porto: Helton - Bosingwa, Pepe, Bruno Alves, Fucile (Bruno Moraes 65), Gonzalez, Paulo Assuncao, Raul Meireles (Cech 56), Lopez, Helder Postiga (Adriano 77), Quaresma.
Chelsea: Cech - Diarra, Terry (Robben 13; Mikel 46), Ricardo Carvalho, Bridge, Essien, Makelele, Ballack, Lampard, Shevchenko (Kalou 88), Drogba.

Feb 21
Roma (Ita) 0
Lyon (Fra) 0
Att: 75,000. **Ref:** Riley (Eng)
Roma: Doni - Panucci, Mexes, Ferrari, Tonetto, Taddei (Vucinic 86), De Rossi, Perrotta, Pizarro, Mancini (Wilhelmsson 76), Totti.
Lyon: Coupet - Clerc, Cris, Squillaci, Abidal, Tiago, Toulalan, Juninho, Govou, Fred (Baros 74), Malouda.

1st knockout round, 2nd legs

Mar 6
Chelsea 2 (Robben 48, Ballack 79)
FC Porto 1 (Quaresma 15)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 39,041. **Ref:** Rosetti (Ita)
Chelsea 3-2 on agg
Chelsea: Cech - Diarra (Paulo Ferreira 66), Ricardo Carvalho, Essien, A Cole, Robben, Makelele (Mikel 46), Ballack, Lampard, Shevchenko (Kalou 84), Drogba.
Porto: Helton - Fucile, Pepe, Bruno Alves, Cech (Adriano 56), Gonzalez, Ricardo Costa, Paulo Assuncao, Raul Meireles (Ibson 56), Lopez (Bruno Moraes 82), Quaresma.

Mar 6
Liverpool 0
Barcelona 1 (Gudjohnsen 75)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 45,000. **Ref:** Fandel (Ger)
Agg 2-2. Liverpool on away goals
Liverpool: Reina - Finnan, Carragher, Agger, Arbeloa, Gerrard, Sissoko, Xabi Alonso, Riise (Fabio Aurelio 77), Bellamy (Pennant 68), Kuijt (Crouch 89).
Barcelona: Valdes - Thuram (Gudjohnsen 71), Marquez, Puyol, Oleguer, Xavi, Iniesta, Deco, Messi, Eto'o (Giuly 61), Ronaldinho.

Mar 6
Lyon 0
Roma 2 (Totti 22, Mancini 44)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 41,000. **Ref:** Mejuto Gonzalez
Roma 2-0 on agg
Lyon: Coupet - Reveillere (Benzema 69), Squillaci, Cris, Abidal, Tiago, Diarra (Kallstrom 46), Juninho, Govou (Wiltord 46), Fred, Malouda.
Roma: Doni - Cassetti, Mexes, Chivu, Tonetto, De Rossi, Pizarro, Taddei, Perrotta, Mancini (Faty 90), Totti.

Mar 6
Valencia 0
Internazionale 0
Att: 53,000. **Ref:** Stark (Ger)
Agg 2-2. Valencia on away goals
Valencia: Canizares - Miguel, Ayala, Albiol, Moretti, Angulo (Joaquin 77), Baraja (Hugo Viana 38), Marchena, Silva, Morientes (Vicente 67), Villa.
Inter: Julio Cesar - Maicon, Cordoba, Materazzi, Maxwell (Grosso 75), Zanetti, Burdisso, Stankovic, Dacourt (Figo 64), Crespo (Cruz 58), Ibrahimovic.

Mar 7
Arsenal 1 (Alex og 58)
PSV Eindhoven 1 (Alex 83)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 60,073. **Ref:** Hamer (Lux)
PSV 2-1 on agg
Arsenal: Lehmann - Toure, Gilberto Silva, Gallas, Clichy (Walcott 85), Hleb, Fabregas, Denilson, Ljungberg (Diaby 76), Adebayor, Julio Baptista (Henry 66).
PSV: Gomes - Feher, Alex, Salcido, Sun, Mendez (Vayrynen 90), Simons, Cocu, Culina, Kone (Afellay 41), Farfan (Addo 89).

Mar 7
Bayern Munich 2 (Makaay 1, Lucio 66)
Real Madrid 1 (Van Nistelrooy pen 83)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 66,000. **Ref:** Michel (Slk)
Agg 4-4. Bayern on away goals
Bayern: Kahn - Sagnol (Gorlitz 85), Lucio, Van Buyten, Lahm, Salihamidzic, Van Bommel, Hargreaves, Schweinsteiger, Makaay (Pizarro 69), Podolski (Demichelis 88). *Sent off: Van Bommel 82min.*
Real Madrid: Casillas - Torres, Sergio Ramos, Ivan Helguera, Roberto Carlos, Emerson (Guti 32), Gago (Robinho 75), Diarra, Raul, Higuain (Cassano 46), Van Nistelrooy. *Sent off: Diarra 82min.*

Mar 7
Manchester United 1 (Larsson 72)
Lille 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 75,182. **Ref:** Medina Cantalejo (Spa)
Man Utd 2-0 on agg
Man Utd: Van der Sar - Neville, Ferdinand, Vidic, Silvestre, Carrick, Scholes, O'Shea, Cristiano Ronaldo (Richardson 74), Larsson (Smith 81), Rooney (Park 81).
Lille: Sylva - Chalme, Tavlaridis, Plestan, Tafforeau, Makoun, Dumont (Fauvergue 74), Keita, Obraniak, Bastos (Debuchy 46), Odemwingie (Mirallas 74).

Mar 7
Milan 1 (Kaka 93)
Celtic 0
Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 0-0. **Att:** 52,918.
Ref: Plautz (Aut)
Milan 1-0 on agg
Milan: Dida - Oddo (Simic 116), Bonera, Maldini, Jankulovski, Gattuso (Brocchi 79), Pirlo, Ambrosini, Seedorf, Kaka, Inzaghi (Gilardino 73).
Celtic: Boruc - Telfer, McManus, O'Dea, Naylor, Nakamura (Miller 106), Lennon, Sno (Beattie 97), McGeady, Jarosik (Gravesen 62), Vennegoor of Hesselink.

Quarter-finals draw

Chelsea v Valencia**
Milan v Bayern Munich*
PSV Eindhoven v Liverpool*
Roma v Manchester United**
**1st legs - Apr 3; 2nd legs - Apr 11*
***1st legs - Apr 4; 2nd legs - Apr 10*

UEFA CUP

1st knockout round, 1st legs

Feb 14/15
AEK Athens (Gre) 0
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) 2 (Traore 45, Mendy 88)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Thomson (Sco)

Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) 3 (Callsen-Bracker 18, Ramelow 43, Schneider 56)
Blackburn (Eng) 2 (Bentley 38, Nonda 87)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Vink (Hol)

Benfica (Por) 1 (Miccoli 90)
Dinamo Bucharest (Rom) 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Bebek (Cro)

Bordeaux (Fra) 0
Osasuna (Spa) 0
Ref: Yefet (Isr)

CSKA Moscow (Rus) 0
Maccabi Haifa (Isr) 0
Ref: Ceferin (Sln)

Fenerbahce (Tur) 3 (Tumer 28, 75, Tuncay 67)
AZ Alkmaar (Hol) 3 (De Zeeuw 15, Boukhari 62, Jenner 63)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Iturralde Gonzalez (Spa)

Hapoel Tel Aviv (Isr) 2 (Toema 43, Dego 76)
Rangers (Sco) 1 (Novo 53)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Alves Garcia (Por)

Lens (Fra) 3 (Jemaa 49, 70, Dindane pen 90)
Panathinaikos (Gre) 1 (Salpingidis 65)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Eriksson (Swe)

Livorno (Ita) 1 (Galante 82)
Espanyol (Spa) 2 (Pandiani pen 28, Yaacoubi 59)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Lannoy (Fra)

Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) 1 (Srna 84)
Nancy (Fra) 1 (Fortune 81)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Briakos (Gre)
Sent off: Tymoshchuk (Shakhtar) 89min

Spartak Moscow (Rus) 1 (Kalinichenko 65)
Celta Vigo (Spa) 1 (Nunez 41)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Kapitanis (Cyp)

Sporting Braga (Por) 1 (Ze Carlos 81)
Parma (Ita) 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Skomina (Sln)

Steaua Bucharest (Rom) 0
Sevilla (Spa) 2 (Poulsen 41, Kanoute pen 77)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Meyer (Ger)

Werder Bremen (Ger) 3 (Mertesacker 48, Naldo 54, Frings 71)
Ajax (Hol) 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Cortez Batista (Por)
Sent off: Lindenbergh (Ajax) 23min

Zulte-Waregem (Blg) 1 (D'Haene 69)
Newcastle (Eng) 3 (Dindeleux og 47, Martins pen 59, Sibierski 76)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Genov (Bul)

1st knockout round, 2nd legs

Feb 22
Ajax 3 (Leonardo 4, Huntelaar 60, Babel 74)
Werder Bremen 1 (Hugo Almeida 14)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Webb (Eng)
Werder 4-3 on agg

AZ Alkmaar 2 (Martens 63, Opdam 86)
Fenerbahce 2 (Tumer 21, Alex 34)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Kircher (Ger)
Agg 5-5. AZ on away goals

Blackburn 0
Bayer Leverkusen 0
Ref: Undiano Mallenco (Spa)
Leverkusen 3-2 on agg

Celta Vigo 2 (Nene 19, Jonathan 78)
Spartak Moscow 1 (Titov 88)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Duhamel (Fra)
Celta 3-2 on agg

Dinamo Bucharest 1 (Munteanu 24)
Benfica 2 (Anderson 50, Katsouranis 64)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Vollquartz (Den)
Benfica 3-1 on agg

Espanyol 2 (Lacruz 15, Coro 49)
Livorno 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Allaerts (Blg)
Sent off: Cesar (Livorno) 78min
Espanyol 4-1 on agg

Maccabi Haifa 1 (Colautti 13)
CSKA Moscow 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Lehner (Aut)
Maccabi 1-0 on agg

Nancy 0
Shakhtar Donetsk 1 (Fernandinho 71)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Gilewski (Pol)
Shakhtar 2-1 on agg

Newcastle 1 (Martins 68)
Zulte-Waregem 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ivanov (Rus)
Newcastle 4-1 on agg

Osasuna 1 (Nekounam 120)
Bordeaux 0
Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 0-0. **Ref:** Messina (Ita)
Osasuna 1-0 on agg

Panathinaikos 0
Lens 0
Ref: Jara (Cze)
Sent off: Morris (Panathinaikos) 80min
Lens 3-1 on agg

Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Frau 42, Mendy pen 90)
AEK Athens 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Paparesta (Ita)
Paris Saint-Germain 4-0 on agg

Parma 0
Sporting Braga 1 (Diego 89)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Hrinak (Slk)
Sent off: Frechaut (Braga) 76min
Braga 2-0 on agg

Rangers 4 (Ferguson 24, 73, Boyd 35, Adam 90)
Hapoel Tel Aviv 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Trefoloni (Ita)
Sent off: McGregor (Rangers) 74min
Rangers 5-2 on agg

Sevilla 1 (Kerzhakov 45)
Steaua Bucharest 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Dougal (Sco)
Sevilla 3-0 on agg

Bye to 2nd knockout round: Tottenham (Eng). Feyenoord (Hol), Tottenham's prospective 1st knockout round opponents, were expelled because of the trouble caused by their fans at the group game away to Nancy

2nd knockout round, 1st legs

Mar 8
Celta Vigo 0
Werder Bremen 1 (Hugo Almeida 84)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Malek (Pol)

Lens 2 (Monterrubio 16, Cousin pen 69)
Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Hagui 51)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Webb (Eng)
Sent off: Hagui (Leverkusen) 68min

Maccabi Haifa 0
Espanyol 0
Ref: Bebek (Cro)

Newcastle 4 (Steinsson og 7, Dyer 22, Martins 23, 37)
AZ Alkmaar 2 (Arveladze 31, Koevermans 73)
HT: 4-1. **Ref:** Busacca (Swi)

Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Pauleta 35, Frau 39)
Benfica 1 (Simao 10)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Poll (Eng)

Rangers 1 (Hemdani 90)
Osasuna 1 (Raul Garcia 17)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Wegereef (Hol)

Sevilla 2 (Marti pen 8, Maresca pen 88)
Shakhtar Donetsk 2 (Hubschman 19, Matuzalem pen 60)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Kassai (Hun)

Sporting Braga 2 (Paulo Jorge 76, Ze Carlos 81)
Tottenham 3 (Keane 57, 90, Malbranque 72)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Baskakov (Rus)

ROYAL LEAGUE

Group 1
Feb 18: OB Odense (Den) 3 Helsingborgs (Swe) 0.
Feb 25: OB Odense 3 Brann (Nor) 2.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
OB	6	4	1	1	13	7	13
Brann	6	2	3	1	13	11	9
Helsingborgs	6	2	3	1	8	8	9
Rosenborg (Nor)	6	0	1	5	7	15	1

Group 2
Feb 11: FC Copenhagen (Den) 0 Brondby (Den) 1.
Feb 18: Brondby 1 FC Copenhagen 3.
Feb 25: FC Copenhagen 4 Hammarby (Swe) 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lillestrom (Nor)	6	3	3	0	7	3	12
Brondby	6	3	2	1	10	8	11
Copenhagen	6	3	0	3	9	5	9
Hammarby	6	0	1	5	5	15	1

Group 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Valerenga (Nor)	6	4	2	0	13	8	14
Elfsborg (Swe)	6	2	2	2	11	8	8
AIK (Swe)	6	1	3	2	7	12	6
Viborg (Den)	6	0	3	3	6	9	3

Top two in each group and the two third-placed sides with the best record qualified for quarter-finals

Quarter-finals

Mar 1: Brondby 3 Brann 0; Valerenga 1 Helsingborgs 2.
Mar 4: Elfsborg 1 FC Copenhagen 2; OB Odense 2 Lillestrom 2 (aet; OB 4-1 on pens).

Semi-finals

Mar 8: Brondby 2 OB Odense 1; FC Copenhagen 3 Helsingborgs 1.

AUSTRIA

Feb 24: Pasching 2 Mattersburg 0; Sturm Graz 1 SV Ried 1; Rapid Wien 2 Altach 1; Salzburg 2 Grazer AK 1.
Feb 25: Wacker Tirol 2 Austria Wien 2.
Mar 3: Mattersburg 1 SV Ried 2; Altach 1 Sturm Graz 3; Pasching 0 Salzburg 1; Grazer AK 3 Wacker Tirol 2.
Mar 4: Austria Wien 2 Rapid Wien 1.

AUSTRIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Salzburg	23	15	5	3	47	13	50
Pasching	23	9	7	7	27	24	34
Mattersburg	23	10	4	9	31	37	34
SV Ried	23	6	11	6	25	24	29
Wacker Tirol	23	7	8	8	26	32	29
Grazer AK	23	6	9	8	31	37	27
Altach	23	8	3	12	33	41	27
Rapid Wien	23	6	8	9	30	34	26
Sturm Graz*	23	8	5	10	24	29	26
Austria Wien	23	5	10	8	25	28	25

**3pts deducted for licence application irregularities*

BELGIUM

Saturday, February 10
FC Brussels 2 (Culek 42, Citony 70)
Lierse 1 (Snelders 40) Att: 5,000

Genk 3 (Soetaers 4, Ljubojevic 10, Haroun 11)
Cercle Brugge 0 Att: 21,529

Germinal Beerschot 3 (Cavens 45, Colman 50, De Roeck 55)
St Truiden 2 (Mulemo 41, Sishuba 48) Att: 7,474

Lokeren 1 (Mbayo 51)
Roeselare 1 (Dufoor 56) Att: 4,400

Mouscron 4 (Tomou Bayard 55, Custovic 60, 69, 89)
Beveren 2 (Gervinho 7, Seka 29) Att: 3,400

Westerlo 2 (Ogunsoto 13, 25)
Mons 1 (Gaspercic og 28) Att: 4,000

Zulte-Waregem 3 (Matthijs pen 59, De Brul 63, Van Nieuwenhuyze 90)
Standard 1 (Defour 88) Att: 8,000

Sunday, February 11
Charleroi 1 (Akgul pen 87)
Gent 0 Att: 9,841

Club Brugge 2 (Ishiaku 33, 66)
Anderlecht 2 (Juhasz 78, Frutos 90) Att: 28,132

Friday, February 16
Mons 1 (Brahami 71)
Club Brugge 0 Att: 6,000

Saturday, February 17
Anderlecht 2 (Toyes og 8, Frutos 13)
Mouscron 1 (Teklak 7) Att: 24,125

Beveren 3 (Dissa 38, 89, Seka 53)
Lokeren 2 (Kristinsson pen 7, Joao Carlos 80) Att: 6,000

Germinal Beerschot 3 (Cavens 21, 50, 68)
FC Brussels 0 Att: 7,539

Roeselare 1 (Allagui 77)
Charleroi 3 (Smolders 56, Perbet 61, Akgul 86) Att: 4,500

St Truiden 0
Westerlo 2 (Ogunsoto 77, Dekelver 82) Att: 7,000

Standard 3 (Jovanovic pen 30, Fellaini 49, Dupre pen 90)
Lierse 2 (Snelders 84, 85) Att: 23,000

Sunday, February 18
Cercle Brugge 2 (Pivaljevic 52, Nyoni Vuza 58)
Zulte-Waregem 0 Att: 5,200

Gent 1 (Olufade pen 36)
Genk 3 (Vrancken 7, Mikulic 65, Haroun 72) Att: 12,144

Friday, February 23
Club Brugge 1 (Yulu-Matondo 87)
St Truiden 0 Att: 23,805

Saturday, February 24
FC Brussels 0
Standard 3 (Lukunku 16, 42, Sergio Conceicao pen 71) Att: 8,000

Charleroi 2 (Akpala 77, Akgul 89)
Beveren 1 (Gervinho 21) Att: 9,000

Genk 3 (Soetaers 2, Coelho 68, Vossen 88)
Roeselare 0 Att: 22,000

Lierse 0
Cercle Brugge 2 (De Smet 58, Boi 77) Att: 7,262

Mouscron 2 (Dugardein 3, Nicoise 39)
Mons 2 (Nicaise 25, Rabesandratana 89) Att: 4,000

Westerlo 1 (Delen 51)
Germinal Beerschot 1 (Sterchele 58) Att: 6,000

Sunday, February 25
Lokeren 1 (Dufer 41)
Anderlecht 1 (Frutos 90) Att: 8,300

Zulte-Waregem 3 (Sergeant 43, 57, Dosunmu 44)
Gent 2 (Sveticic 51, Olufade 72) Att: 7,000

Friday, March 2
Roeselare 3 (De Brul og 58, Kpaka 77, 83)
Zulte-Waregem 1 (Minne 89) Att: 7,296

Saturday, March 3
Anderlecht 3 (Hassan 12, 77, 89)
Charleroi 2 (Camus 68, Jovial 85) Att: 24,743

Beveren 0
Genk 5 (Vandenbergh 19, Chatelle 23, 70, Haroun 44, Vrancken 66) Att: 6,500

Cercle Brugge 0
Standard 2 (Lukunku 59, 83) Att: 7,933

Gent 4 (Pavlovic 12, 29, Olufade 63, 76)
Lierse 0 Att: 9,844

Mons 1 (Dahmane 41)
Lokeren 0 Att: 4,500

St Truiden 1 (Van Houdt 20)
Mouscron 1 (Toyes 28) Att: 6,500

Westerlo 1 (Dekelver 23)
FC Brussels 1 (Bruno 73) Att: 4,000

Sunday, March 4
Germinal Beerschot 4 (Sterchele 35, 58, Dheedene 69, Cavens 86)
Club Brugge 0 Att: 12,200

BELGIUM	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Genk	24	17	5	2	58	21	56
Anderlecht	24	16	6	2	47	24	54
Standard	24	15	4	5	51	29	49
Gent	24	13	4	7	42	30	43
Club Brugge	24	11	6	7	40	27	39
Charleroi	24	11	6	7	34	29	39
Westerlo	24	10	6	8	30	28	36
Germinal B	24	9	7	8	34	33	34
Roeselare	24	9	7	8	37	38	34
Cercle Brugge	24	8	4	12	20	26	28
Zulte-Waregem	24	7	7	10	29	36	28
Mons	24	7	6	11	22	31	27
St Truiden	24	7	4	13	29	37	25
FC Brussels	24	5	10	9	24	33	25
Mouscron	24	5	9	10	33	43	24
Lokeren	24	4	9	11	20	32	21
Beveren	24	5	5	14	22	43	20
Lierse	24	3	3	18	16	48	12

LEADING GOALSCORERS
17 Patrick Ogunsoto (Westerlo)
15 Mohammed Tchite (Anderlecht)
14 Adekanmi Olufade (Gent)
14 Francois Sterchele (Germinal Beerschot)

BELGIAN CUP – quarter-finals

1st legs - Feb 28
Club Brugge v Kortrijk 2-1
Genk v Anderlecht 0-1
Gent v Mechelen 2-1
Royal Antwerp v Standard 0-1

BULGARIA

Mar 3: Levski 10 Chernomorets 0; Lokomotiv Sofia 1 Vihren 0; Botev 2 Rodopa 1; Beroe 1 Marek 1; Rilski 1 Lokomotiv Plovdiv 3; Spartak Varna 1 Lovech 3.
Mar 4: CSKA 0 Cherno More 0; Slavia 2 Belasitsa 1.

BULGARIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Levski	16	13	3	0	49	2	42
CSKA	16	12	2	2	36	7	38
Lok Sofia	16	11	3	2	32	13	36
Lovech	16	9	5	2	23	13	32
Slavia	16	7	5	4	26	20	26
Cherno More	16	7	4	5	24	13	25
Botev	16	8	1	7	26	25	25
Lok Plovdiv	16	6	3	7	21	20	21
Beroe	16	6	3	7	23	19	21
Vihren	16	6	2	8	15	18	20
Spartak Varna	16	6	1	9	16	33	19
Marek	16	4	5	7	21	31	17
Belasitsa	16	4	3	9	20	24	15
Rilski	16	5	0	11	16	32	15
Rodopa	16	3	1	12	15	28	10
Chernomorets*	16	0	1	15	4	69	-2

**3pts deducted for failing to register enough youth players*

CROATIA

Feb 17: Varteks 0 Slaven 0; Cibalia 0 Medimurje 3; Kamen Ingrad 1 Pula 0; Zagreb 3 Sibenik 0; Rijeka 2 Dinamo 3; Hajduk 3 Osijek 0.
Feb 24: Osijek 4 Varteks 1; Dinamo 2 Hajduk 1; Sibenik 2 Rijeka 2; Pula 0 Zagreb 2; Medimurje 2 Kamen Ingrad 0; Slaven 2 Cibalia 0.
Mar 3: Kamen Ingrad 2 Cibalia 2; Zagreb 4 Medimurje 0; Rijeka 2 Pula 0; Hajduk 3 Sibenik 0; Varteks 1 Dinamo 3; Osijek 1 Slaven 1.

CROATIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo	21	18	2	1	54	18	56
Hajduk	21	16	2	3	39	12	50
Zagreb	21	13	1	7	36	19	40
Sibenik	21	9	4	8	31	30	31
Medimurje	21	10	1	10	30	33	31
Slaven	21	8	4	9	22	24	28
Varteks	21	8	4	9	31	38	28
Rijeka	21	8	3	10	35	36	27
Osijek	21	6	8	7	23	31	26
Pula	21	4	6	11	18	28	18
Cibalia	21	3	3	15	18	40	12
Kamen Ingrad	21	3	2	16	20	48	11

CZECH REPUBLIC

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sparta	17	10	6	1	20	6	36
Slavia	17	10	4	3	29	15	34
Liberec	17	9	6	2	24	9	33
Mlada Boleslav	17	9	3	5	26	20	30
Jablonec	17	6	7	4	21	18	25
Brno	17	6	7	4	15	16	25
C Budejovice	17	7	4	6	19	22	25
Teplice	17	6	6	5	30	24	24
Ostrava	17	5	6	6	23	23	21
Plzen	17	5	6	6	18	20	21
Most	17	4	7	6	21	24	19
Olomouc	17	5	3	9	17	23	18
Kladno	17	5	3	9	16	27	18
Zlin	17	3	5	9	11	21	14
Pribram	17	2	7	8	11	21	13
Slovacko	17	1	6	10	11	23	9

DENMARK

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FC Copenhagen	18	13	4	1	35	12	43
Midtjylland	18	11	4	3	36	20	37
OB	18	10	5	3	24	15	35
AaB	18	9	4	5	23	17	31
Nordsjaelland	18	9	3	6	35	20	30
Esbjerg	18	7	5	6	31	29	26
Brondby	18	6	6	6	24	21	24
Randers	18	6	4	8	24	26	22
Viborg	18	5	3	10	18	35	18
Horsens	18	3	7	8	12	23	16
Vejle	18	2	3	13	19	42	9
Silkeborg	18	2	2	14	15	36	8

ENGLAND

Saturday, February 10
Chelsea 3 (Drogba 45, 83, Abel Xavier og 66)
Middlesbrough 0 Att: 41,699

Everton 1 (Johnson 10)
Blackburn 0 Att: 35,593

Manchester United 2 (Park 24, Fletcher 82)
Charlton 0 Att: 75,883

Newcastle 2 (Martins 27, Solano pen 70)
Liverpool 1 (Bellamy 6) Att: 52,305

Portsmouth 2 (Pedro Mendes 5, Kanu 81)
Manchester City 1 (Corradi 62) Att: 19,344

Reading 2 (Sidwell 16, 90)
Aston Villa 0 Att: 24,122

Sheffield United 2 (Hulse 27, Jagielka pen 62)
Tottenham 1 (Jenas 2) Att: 32,144

West Ham 0
Watford 1 (Henderson pen 12) Att: 34,625

Sunday, February 11
Arsenal 2 (Hall og 81, Rosicky 85)
Wigan 1 (Landzaat 35) Att: 60,049

Bolton 2 (Speed pen 23, Nolan 51)
Fulham 1 (Knight 66) Att: 24,919

Wednesday, February 21
Everton 1 (Arteta 42)
Tottenham 2 (Berbatov 35, Jenas 89) Att: 34,121

Watford 1 (Henderson 24)
Wigan 1 (Folan 40) Att: 18,338

Saturday, February 24
Charlton 4 (Ambrose 24, Thomas 35, 80, D Bent 41)
West Ham 0 Att: 27,111

Fulham 1 (McBride 17)
Manchester United 2 (Giggs 29, Cristiano Ronaldo 88) Att: 24,459

Liverpool 4 (Fowler pen 20, pen 25, Hyypia 70, Gerrard 73)
Sheffield United 0 Att: 44,198

Middlesbrough 2 (Viduka 7, Aiyegbeni 69)
Reading 1 (Oster 87) Att: 26,412

Watford 0
Everton 3 (Manuel Fernandes 23, Johnson pen 25, Osman 90) Att: 18,761

Sunday, February 25
Blackburn 3 (Nonda 1, 25, Warnock 50)
Portsmouth 0 Att: 17,434

Tottenham 4 (Keane 11, 22, Jenas 19, Lennon 90)
Bolton 1 (Speed pen 37) Att: 35,747

Wigan 1 (Taylor 40)
Newcastle 0 Att: 21,179

Saturday, March 3
Arsenal 2 (Gilberto Silva pen 51, Julio Baptista 62)
Reading 1 (Fabregas og 87) Att: 60,132

Fulham 1 (Bocanegra 23)
Aston Villa 1 (Carew 21) Att: 24,552

Liverpool 0
Manchester United 1 (O'Shea 90) Att: 44,403

Manchester City 0
Wigan 1 (Folan 18) Att: 39,923

Newcastle 0
Middlesbrough 0 Att: 52,303

Portsmouth 0
Chelsea 2 (Drogba 33, Kalou 82) Att: 20,219

Sheffield United 1 (Hulse 52)
Everton 1 (Arteta pen 75) Att: 32,019

Watford 2 (Bouazza 15, Francis 21)
Charlton 2 (Young 67, Ambrose 89) Att: 19,782

Sunday, March 4
Bolton 1 (Anelka 87)
Blackburn 2 (McCarthy pen 58, pen 68) Att: 21,743

West Ham 3 (Noble 16, Tevez 41, Zamora 85)
Tottenham 4 (Defoe pen 51, Tainio 63, Berbatov 89, Stalteri 90) Att: 34,966

ENGLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man Utd	29	23	3	3	66	19	72
Chelsea	28	19	6	3	50	19	63
Liverpool	29	16	5	8	44	20	53
Arsenal	27	15	7	5	50	23	52
Bolton	29	14	5	10	34	34	47
Everton	29	11	10	8	37	26	43
Reading	29	13	4	12	43	38	43
Tottenham	29	12	6	11	40	43	42
Portsmouth	29	11	8	10	36	31	41
Blackburn	29	12	4	13	35	39	40
Newcastle	29	10	7	12	34	37	37
Middlesbrough	29	9	9	11	32	34	36
Aston Villa	28	7	12	9	29	34	33
Fulham	29	7	12	10	31	44	33
Wigan	29	9	5	15	30	44	32
Sheffield Utd	29	8	7	14	25	41	31
Man City	27	8	6	13	20	33	30
Charlton	29	6	6	17	26	49	24
Watford	29	3	11	15	18	43	20
West Ham	29	5	5	19	21	50	20

LEADING GOALSCORERS
18 Didier Drogba (Chelsea)
16 Cristiano Ronaldo (Manchester United)
12 Yakubu Aiyegbeni (Middlesbrough)
12 Benni McCarthy (Blackburn)
11 Robin Van Persie (Arsenal)

FA CUP – 4th round (last 32)

Replays
Feb 13: Middlesbrough 2 Bristol City 2 (aet; Middlesbrough 5-4 on pens); Norwich 3 Blackpool 2 (aet).
Feb 14: Bolton 1 Arsenal 3 (aet).

5th round (last 16)

Feb 17: Arsenal 0 Blackburn 0; Chelsea 4 Norwich 0; Manchester United 1 Reading 1; Middlesbrough 2 West Bromwich 2; Plymouth 2 Derby 0; Watford 1 Ipswich 0.
Feb 18: Fulham 0 Tottenham 4; Preston 1 Manchester City 3.

Replays
Feb 27: Reading 2 Manchester United 3; West Bromwich 1 Middlesbrough 1 (aet; Middlesbrough 5-4 on pens).
Feb 28: Blackburn 1 Arsenal 0.

LEAGUE CUP – Final

Feb 25 - Cardiff
Chelsea 2 (Drogba 20, 84)
Arsenal 1 (Walcott 12)
HT: 1-1. Att: 70,073. **Ref:** Webb
Sent off: Mikel (Chelsea) 90min; Toure, Adebayor (both Arsenal) 90min

FRANCE

Saturday, February 10
Auxerre 1 (Akale 19)
Saint-Etienne 1 (Moussilou 74) Att: 13,158

Le Mans 3 (Samassa 14, N'Dri 67, Grafite 72)
Sedan 2 (Job pen 38, Ouadah 90) Att: 9,143

Lyon 1 (Fred 6)
Lorient 0 Att: 37,976

Nantes 2 (Keseru 79, Guillon 86)
Valenciennes 5 (Savidan 18, 49, 72, 88, Dufresne 75) Att: 24,751

Nice 3 (Laslandes 45, 57, Ederson 77)
Troyes 0 Att: 11,711

Paris Saint-Germain 4 (Diane 5, Roma og 35, Gallardo 83, Rodriguez 85)
Monaco 2 (Piquionne 50, Koller 87) Att: 34,171

Rennes 1 (Utaka 86)
Nancy 1 (Kim 56) Att: 22,893

Toulouse 1 (Tafforeau og 90)
Lille 0 Att: 16,252

Sunday, February 11
Bordeaux 1 (Faubert 75)
Marseille 0 Att: 32,200

Lens 3 (Hilton 28, Seydou Keita 30, Dindane 58)
Sochaux 1 (Tosic 85) Att: 31,122

Friday, February 16
Lille 1 (Audel 52)
Lyon 2 (Fred 83, Squillaci 89) Att: 17,092

Saturday, February 17
Lorient 0
Toulouse 1 (Paulo Cesar pen 54) Att: 12,311

Nancy 0
Paris Saint-Germain 3 (Pauleta 70, Frau 86, Gallardo 89) Att: 19,252

Saint-Etienne 1 (Gomis 35)
Rennes 3 (Utaka 15, 59, Marveaux 62) Att: 28,389

Sedan 2 (Sartre 19, Job 23)
Auxerre 2 (Niculae 15, 90) Att: 12,610

Sochaux 2 (Alvaro Santos pen 14, Yebda og 79)
Le Mans 0 Att: 9,996

Troyes 1 (Gigliotti 67)
Bordeaux 0 Att: 10,401

Valenciennes 0
Nice 1 (Kone pen 30) Att: 15,208

Sunday, February 18
Marseille 0
Nantes 0 Att: 48,000

Monaco 0
Lens 0 Att: 10,677

Saturday, February 24
Le Mans 0
Monaco 2 (Piquionne 15, Perez 47) Att: 10,388

Lyon 3 (Baros 40, Wiltord 90, Juninho pen 90)
Sochaux 3 (Alvaro Santos 9, Ziani pen 29, Grax 86) Att: 40,363

Nantes 1 (Keseru 75)
Auxerre 1 (Cheyrou 19) Att: 28,307

Nice 2 (Kone 42, 84)
Lille 1 (Cabaye 62) Att: 11,369

Rennes 0
Sedan 2 (Pujol 14, Boutabout 87) Att: 22,032

Toulouse 3 (Elmander 39, 49, Dieuze 63)
Marseille 0 Att: 35,500

Troyes 3 (Danic 1, 70, Gigliotti 38)
Lorient 0 Att: 8,500

Sunday, February 25
Bordeaux 2 (Cavenaghi pen 25, Jussie 44)
Valenciennes 1 (Dossevi 83) Att: 22,371

Lens 2 (Dindane 18, Seydou Keita pen 24)
Nancy 2 (Fortune 7, Hadji 90) Att: 32,143

Paris Saint-Germain 0
Saint-Etienne 2 (Perquis 30, Ilan 45) Att: 38,857

Saturday, March 3
Auxerre 1 (Jelen 65)
Rennes 0 Att: 7,863

Lille 4 (Keita 15, 33, Dumont 18, 46)
Troyes 0 Att: 13,715

Lorient 0
Nice 0 Att: 12,461

Monaco 0
Bordeaux 0 Att: 11,456

Nancy 1 (Macaluso 37)
Le Mans 1 (Grafite 73) Att: 18,124

Saint-Etienne 1 (Gomis 79)
Lyon 3 (Kallstrom 28, Tiago 38, Fred 48) Att: 35,201

Sedan 2 (Landreau og 7, Boutabout 74)
Paris Saint-Germain 0 Att: 15,851

Valenciennes 0
Toulouse 0 Att: 13,721

Sunday, March 4
Marseille 0
Lens 1 (Dindane pen 59) Att: 51,718

Sochaux 1 (Alvaro Santos pen 34)
Nantes 2 (Payet 23, Keseru 51) Att: 14,664

FRANCE	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lyon	27	19	4	4	50	22	61
Lens	27	13	9	5	41	29	48
Lille	27	11	9	7	36	25	42
Toulouse	27	12	6	9	30	28	42
Sochaux	27	10	10	7	31	30	40
Bordeaux	27	12	4	11	28	29	40
Saint-Etienne	27	11	6	10	42	36	39
Marseille	27	11	5	11	31	28	38
Rennes	27	9	9	9	23	23	36
Nancy	27	9	9	9	25	29	36
Le Mans	27	8	11	8	31	32	35
Auxerre	27	8	11	8	30	33	35
Lorient	27	9	8	10	25	29	35
Monaco	27	9	7	11	31	28	34
Nice	27	7	9	11	24	26	30
Troyes	27	7	9	11	27	38	30
Valenciennes	27	8	5	14	26	39	29
Paris SG	27	6	10	11	27	34	28
Nantes	27	5	11	11	22	33	26
Sedan	27	5	10	12	35	44	25

LEADING GOALSCORERS
13 Steve Savidan (Valenciennes)
11 Aruna Dindane (Lens)
10 Pauleta (Paris Saint-Germain)
9 Fred (Lyon)
9 Araujo Ilan (Saint-Etienne)
9 Frederic Piquionne (Saint-Etienne/Monaco)

FRENCH CUP – quarter-finals

Feb 27: Marseille 5 Vannes 0; Sedan 1 Nantes 1 (aet; Nantes 6-5 on pens).
Feb 28: Montceau 1 Lens 0; Sochaux 2 Paris Saint-Germain 1.

GERMANY

Friday, February 9
Hannover 2 (Balitsch 22, Fahrenhorst 62)
Wolfsburg 2 (Klimowicz 3, Krzynowek 25) Att: 35,244

Saturday, February 10
Bayer Leverkusen 2 (Jones og 40, Kiessling 90)
Eintracht Frankfurt 2 (Kyrgiakos 42, Meier 85) Att: 22,500

Hamburg 3 (Van der Vaart pen 11, Benjamin 39, Mahdavikia 90)
Borussia Dortmund 0 Att: 57,000

Mainz 4 (Andreasen 7, Zidan 22, pen 40, 60)
Energie Cottbus 1 (Radu 20) Att: 20,000

Monchengladbach 0
Alemannia Aachen 0 Att: 50,230

Schalke 2 (Kuranyi 64, Lovenkrands 75)
Hertha 0 Att: 61,482

Stuttgart 4 (Hilbert 3, Gomez 15, Magnin 33, Streller 86)
Werder Bremen 1 (Diego 21) Att: 56,500

Sunday, February 11
Bayern Munich 1 (Makaay 8)
Arminia Bielefeld 0 Att: 69,000

Bochum 0
Nurnberg 2 (Saenko 88, 90) Att: 18,110

Friday, February 16
Eintracht Frankfurt 0
Stuttgart 4 (Hilbert 2, Gomez 16, Osorio 44, Hitzlsperger 78) Att: 46,000

Saturday, February 17
Alemannia Aachen 1 (Klitzpera 10)
Bayern Munich 0 Att: 20,832

Bayer Leverkusen 0
Hannover 1 (Rosenthal 7) Att: 21,000

Borussia Dortmund 1 (Frei 19)
Monchengladbach 0 Att: 73,600

Hertha 1 (Dardai 22)
Mainz 2 (Zidan pen 54, Andreasen 64) Att: 35,473

Werder Bremen 0
Hamburg 2 (Van der Vaart pen 42, 87) Att: 42,100

Wolfsburg 2 (Klimowicz 56, 89)
Schalke 2 (Kuranyi 10, 29) Att: 28,346

Sunday, February 18
Arminia Bielefeld 1 (Wichniarek 26)
Bochum 3 (Gekas 2, 10, Dabrowski 51) Att: 20,000

Nurnberg 1 (Beauchamp 73)
Energie Cottbus 0 Att: 40,580

Friday, February 23
Stuttgart 0
Hertha 0 Att: 45,000

Saturday, February 24
Bayern Munich 2 (Podolski pen 26, Van Bommel 56)
Wolfsburg 1 (Makiadi 79) Att: 69,000

Bochum 2 (Gekas 25, Epalle 52)
Alemannia Aachen 2 (Ibisevic 35, Lehmann 57) Att: 21,350

Energie Cottbus 2 (Kukielka 62, Radu 66)
Arminia Bielefeld 1 (Gabriel 15) Att: 12,227

Hamburg 3 (Van der Vaart 7, Trochowski 77, Olic 90)
Eintracht Frankfurt 1 (Takahara 59) Att: 57,000

Hannover 4 (Huszti pen 56, Stajner 69, Bruggink 76, 78)
Borussia Dortmund 2 (Smolarek 87, Kringe 90) Att: 43,852

Mainz 2 (Zidan 20, 27)
Nurnberg 1 (Saenko 64) Att: 20,300

Sunday, February 25
Monchengladbach 2 (Delura 17, Rafael 90)
Werder Bremen 2 (Wome 11, Vranjes 84) Att: 50,664

Schalke 0
Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Kiessling 85) Att: 61,482

Friday, March 2
Schalke 0
Hamburg 2 (Van der Vaart 71, Olic 80) Att: 61,482

Saturday, March 3
Arminia Bielefeld 3 (Kucera 45, Wichniarek pen 50, Bohme 86)
Nurnberg 2 (Banovic 16, Engelhardt 83) Att: 18,444

Bayer Leverkusen 3 (Voronin 19, Freier 22, Juan 61)
Stuttgart 1 (Cacau 73) Att: 22,500

Eintracht Frankfurt 2 (Takahara 58, Thurk 74)
Hannover 0 Att: 40,038

Hertha 2 (Gimenez 58, Van Burik 82)
Bayern Munich 3 (Salihamidzic 30, Podolski 31, Makaay 68) Att: 74,220

Werder Bremen 3 (Hunt 25, 73, 76)
Bochum 0 Att: 40,156

Wolfsburg 1 (Makiadi 65)
Monchengladbach 0 Att: 21,343

Sunday, March 4
Alemannia Aachen 2 (Schlaudraff 47, Ibisevic 49)
Mainz 1 (Zidan 14) Att: 20,800

Borussia Dortmund 2 (Frei 42, 86)
Energie Cottbus 3 (Munteanu 6, pen 56, Shao 65) Att: 64,100

GERMANY	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Schalke	24	15	4	5	40	24	49
Werder Bremen	24	14	4	6	56	32	46
Stuttgart	24	13	6	5	42	29	45
Bayern Munich	24	13	4	7	38	29	43
Nurnberg	24	8	12	4	34	22	36
B Leverkusen	24	10	5	9	39	35	35
Hertha	24	9	7	8	35	38	34
Hannover	24	9	6	9	32	36	33
Wolfsburg	24	6	10	8	24	28	28
B Dortmund	24	7	7	10	29	35	28
E Cottbus	24	7	7	10	28	34	28
Hamburg	24	5	12	7	29	27	27
Alemannia	24	7	6	11	37	45	27
Mainz	24	6	9	9	22	35	27
A Bielefeld	24	6	8	10	31	33	26
E Frankfurt	24	5	11	8	30	42	26
Bochum	24	6	6	12	27	39	24
M'gladbach	24	5	6	13	18	30	21

LEADING GOALSCORERS
13 Mario Gomez (Stuttgart)
12 Roy Makaay (Bayern Munich)
11 Alexander Frei (Borussia Dortmund)
11 Miroslav Klose (Werder Bremen)
11 Kevin Kuranyi (Schalke)
11 Marko Pantelic (Hertha)

GERMAN CUP – quarter-finals

Feb 27: Kickers Offenbach 0 Eintracht Frankfurt 3; Nurnberg 0 Hannover 0 (aet; Nurnberg 4-2 on pens); Wolfsburg 2 Alemannia Aachen 0.
Feb 28: Stuttgart 2 Hertha 0.

GREECE

Feb 10: Ergotelis 0 AEK 0; Panionios 0 Aris 0.
Feb 11: Ionikos 0 Kerkira 0; Atromitos 1 Aigaleo 1; Xanthi 1 Larisa 0; Apollon 3 PAOK 1; Panathinaikos 2 OFI 2; Olympiakos 2 Iraklis 0.
Feb 17: PAOK 1 Aris 0; Aigaleo 3 Ionikos 1.
Feb 18: AEK 1 Panathinaikos 4; Olympiakos 4 Atromitos 1; OFI 2 Apollon 0; Larisa 1 Panionios 0; Kerkira 0 Xanthi 0; Iraklis 0 Ergotelis 1.
Feb 24: PAOK 1 Larisa 3; Atromitos 1 Ionikos 0.
Feb 25: Xanthi 0 Aigaleo 0; Panionios 3 Kerkira 1; Ergotelis 1 Olympiakos 2; Panathinaikos 3 Iraklis 0; Aris 3 OFI 1; Apollon 1 AEK 2.
Mar 3: Ionikos 0 Xanthi 2; AEK 3 Aris 1.
Mar 4: Ergotelis 1 Atromitos 0; Aigaleo 0 Panionios 2; Iraklis 0 Apollon 1; Kerkira 0 PAOK 0; Larisa 1 OFI 2; Olympiakos 0 Panathinaikos 1.

GREECE	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olympiakos	24	19	2	3	51	17	59
Panathinaikos	24	16	3	5	42	20	51
AEK	24	14	7	3	47	21	49
Aris	24	7	12	5	24	22	33
PAOK	24	9	6	9	24	24	33
OFI	24	9	6	9	30	34	33
Panionios	24	8	8	8	22	25	32
Larisa	24	8	7	9	27	32	31
Xanthi	24	7	9	8	15	14	30
Ergotelis	24	8	6	10	23	24	30
Atromitos	24	7	9	8	31	36	30
Apollon	24	7	7	10	21	28	28
Kerkira	24	6	9	9	22	26	27
Aigaleo	24	7	6	11	23	31	27
Iraklis	24	6	4	14	20	32	22
Ionikos*	24	2	3	19	9	45	4

**5pts deducted – 3pts for club chairman's attack on a referee, 2pts for crowd trouble during a home game*

ESM
EUROPEAN SPORTS MAGAZINES
GOLDEN SHOE

STANDINGS ON MARCH 4

POS		TEAM	GOALS	FACTOR	PTS
1	Didier Drogba	Chelsea (Eng)	18	2	36
	Frederic Kanoute	Sevilla (Spa)	18	2	36
3	Ronaldinho	Barcelona (Spa)	17	2	34
4	Afonso Alves	Heerenveen (Hol)	22	1.5	33
5	Cristiano Ronaldo	Manchester United (Eng)	16	2	32
	Diego Milito	Zaragoza (Spa)	16	2	32
	Francesco Totti	Roma (Ita)	16	2	32
8	Maksim Gruznov	Trans Narva (Est)	31	1	31
9	Luca Toni	Fiorentina (Ita)	15	2	30
10	Danny Koevermans	AZ (Hol)	19	1.5	28.5
	Daniel Nannskog	Stabaek (Nor)	19	1.5	28.5
12	Rolando Bianchi	Reggina (Ita)	14	2	28
13	Veigar Pall Gunnarsson	Stabaek (Nor)	18	1.5	27
	Dmitri Lipartov	Trans Narva (Est)	27	1	27
	Blaise N'Kufo	Twente (Hol)	18	1.5	27
	Roman Pavlyuchenko	Spartak Moscow (Rus)	18	1.5	27
	Alexander Zickler	Salzburg (Aut)	18	1.5	27
18	Mario Gomez	Stuttgart (Ger)	13	2	26
	Steve Savidan	Valenciennes (Fra)	13	2	26
20	Steffen Iversen	Rosenborg (Nor)	17	1.5	25.5
	Danko Lazovic	Vitesse (Hol)	17	1.5	25.5
	Patrick Ogunsoto	Westerlo (Blg)	17	1.5	25.5
	Mladen Petric	Basle (Swi)	17	1.5	25.5

HOLLAND

Friday, February 9
Excelsior 0
Groningen 2 (Lovre 23, Suarez 49) Att: 3,156

Saturday, February 10
AZ 2 (Koevermans 15, Martens 72)
Willem II 0 Att: 15,978

Heerenveen 0
Vitesse 0 Att: 25,200

RKC 2 (Vertonghen 35, Van den Bergh 85)
Heracles 0 Att: 5,460

Roda JC 1 (Sibum 33)
NEC 0 Att: 12,537

Sunday, February 11
Den Haag 1 (Kolk 20)
Ajax 2 (Heitinga 58, Huntelaar 69) Att: 8,276

Sparta 1 (Medunjanin 76)
PSV 1 (Culina 46) Att: 10,350

Twente 3 (Heubach 25, Bakircioglu 58, 88)
Feyenoord 0 Att: 13,250

Utrecht 1 (Kopteff 76)
NAC 0 Att: 18,750

Friday, February 16
NAC 3 (Salmon 32, De Graaf 55, Rigters 78)
Sparta 1 (Polak pen 81) Att: 14,375

Willem II 2 (Cristiano 32, 61)
Den Haag 1 (Kolk 16) Att: 12,500

Saturday, February 17
Heracles 0
PSV 2 (Farfan 74, Diego Tardelli 90) Att: 8,500

NEC 1 (Barreto 60)
RKC 0 Att: 11,750

Vitesse 0
Roda JC 0 Att: 19,500

Sunday, February 18
Ajax 2 (Davids 19, Huntelaar 38)
Excelsior 2 (Slory 25, Rojer 30) Att: 47,905

Feyenoord 2 (De Guzman 7, Haristeas 19)
Utrecht 0 Att: 38,000

Groningen 1 (Nevland 56)
AZ 1 (Koevermans 26) Att: 19,000

Heerenveen 1 (Hansson 67)
Twente 2 (N'Kufo 15, Bakircioglu 33) Att: 25,000

Friday, February 23
Utrecht 3 (Somers 45, Rossini 48, Caluwe 63)
NEC 0 Att: 19,000

Saturday, February 24
PSV 1 (Alex 85)
Groningen 0 Att: 33,400

Roda JC 1 (Oper 43)
Heerenveen 0 Att: 15,184

Sparta 0
Heracles 0 Att: 10,150

Twente 0
Willem II 0 Att: 13,000

Sunday, February 25
AZ 1 (Martens 79)
Ajax 1 (Perez 65) Att: 16,458

Den Haag 3 (Hoogendorp 40, pen 62, Delorge 66)
Feyenoord 3 (Kolkka 19, Haristeas 55, 73) Att: 8,814

Excelsior 0
NAC 2 (Mtiliga 51, Diba 73) Att: 3,312

RKC 3 (Vertonghen 36, Van de Haar 75, Janssen 85)
Vitesse 1 (Lazovic pen 20) Att: 6,014

Friday, March 2
NEC 0
Twente 3 (Bakircioglu 48, Touma 54, 69) Att: 12,000

Saturday, March 3
Groningen 3 (Fledderus 6, Nevland 67, Van de Laak pen 79)
NAC 1 (De Graaf 49) Att: 18,443

PSV 2 (Farfan 3, Alcides 19)
RKC 0 Att: 33,300

Vitesse 2 (Lazovic 14, Knol 71)
Excelsior 3 (Voskamp 64, Rojer 83, Slory 85) Att: 19,450

Willem II 0
Sparta 0 Att: 12,200

Sunday, March 4
Ajax 0
Heerenveen 1 (Nilsson 17) Att: 50,174

Feyenoord 1 (Van Hooijdonk 83)
Roda JC 1 (Cisse 56) Att: 42,000

Heracles 3 (Maas pen 35, Gluscevic 77, Bridji 83)
Den Haag 1 (Mols 68) Att: 8,361

Utrecht 0
AZ 4 (Martens 18, Arveladze 22, Dembele 67, Koevermans 86) Att: 19,000

HOLLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PSV	27	21	3	3	64	15	66
AZ	27	17	7	3	71	26	58
Twente	27	17	6	4	58	27	57
Ajax	27	17	5	5	61	29	56
Feyenoord	27	14	5	8	52	52	47
Heerenveen	27	12	5	10	43	33	41
Roda JC	27	11	8	8	32	32	41
NAC	27	12	5	10	37	38	41
Groningen	27	11	5	11	41	46	38
Utrecht	27	10	6	11	32	39	36
NEC	27	9	7	11	25	34	34
Vitesse	27	9	6	12	43	43	33
Sparta	27	8	5	14	30	49	29
Heracles	27	5	8	14	23	49	23
Willem II	27	6	5	16	25	55	23
Excelsior	27	5	5	17	34	54	20
RKC	27	4	7	16	24	51	19
Den Haag	27	3	6	18	31	54	15

LEADING GOALSCORERS
22 Afonso Alves (Heerenveen)
19 Danny Koevermans (AZ)
18 Blaise N'Kufo (Twente)
17 Danko Lazovic (Vitesse)
16 Jefferson Farfan (PSV)

DUTCH CUP – quarter-finals

Feb 28: NAC 3 PSV 0; RKC 1 Roda JC 0; Utrecht 1 AZ 2; Willem II 0 Ajax 2.

HUNGARY

Feb 23: Vasas 0 Debrecen 1.
Feb 24: Zalaegerszeg 2 Diosgyor 2; Rakospalota 2 Gyor 0; Sopron 0 MTK 3; Paks 0 Tatabanya 1; Kaposvar 3 Vac 0; Pecs 2 Fehervar 0.
Feb 26: Ujpest 4 Honved 2.
Mar 2: MTK 0 Pecs 0.
Mar 3: Fehervar 1 Paks 1; Ujpest 0 Rakospalota 0; Diosgyor 0 Sopron 2; Honved 6 Vac 0; Gyor 2 Zalaegerszeg 1; Tatabanya 1 Vasas 3.
Mar 5: Debrecen 1 Kaposvar 0.

HUNGARY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
MTK	19	14	3	2	37	12	45
Debrecen	19	13	3	3	35	13	42
Zalaegerszeg	19	11	3	5	32	24	36
Ujpest	19	10	3	6	27	17	33
Fehervar	19	9	2	8	25	23	29
Diosgyor	19	9	2	8	26	26	29
Vasas	19	9	2	8	19	23	29
Pecs	19	6	7	6	21	25	25
Tatabanya	19	7	2	10	30	32	23
Paks	19	6	5	8	17	19	23
Gyor	19	6	5	8	24	28	23
Sopron	19	7	2	10	17	32	23
Honved	19	6	4	9	31	29	22
Rakospalota	19	5	5	9	23	33	20
Kaposvar	19	5	2	12	19	26	17
Vac	19	1	6	12	12	33	9

ITALY

Sunday, February 11
Atalanta 0
Lazio 0 *Match played behind closed doors*

Cagliari 2 (Capone 38, Suazo 66)
Siena 2 (Corvia 29, Codrea 82) Att: 5,000

Chievo 0
Inter 2 (Adriano 1, Crespo 51)
Match played behind closed doors

Fiorentina 2 (Reginaldo 16, Pazzini 44)
Udinese 0 *Match played behind closed doors*

Messina 1 (Zanchi 35)
Catania 1 (Mascara 60)
Match played behind closed doors

Milan 2 (Gattuso 29, Jankulovski 68)
Livorno 1 (Lucarelli 31) Att: 21,649

Palermo 0
Empoli 1 (Almiron 46) Att: 19,144

Roma 3 (Totti 50, Perrotta 66, Taddei 90)
Parma 0 Att: 38,897

Sampdoria 2 (Maggio 48, Franceschini 75)
Ascoli 0 Att: 16,662

Torino 1 (Comotto 50)
Reggina 2 (Bianchi 48, 58) Att: 18,783

Saturday, February 17
Empoli 1 (Pozzi 5)
Roma 0 *Match played behind closed doors*

Inter 1 (Burdisso 11)
Cagliari 0 Att: 35,152

Siena 3 (Vergassola 19, Maccarone 30, 89)
Milan 4 (Ronaldo 15, 81, Ricardo Oliveira 28, Molinaro og 90) Att: 11,191

Sunday, February 18
Ascoli 2 (Soncin 60, 71)
Udinese 2 (Iaquinta 36, Barreto 42) Att: 400

Catania 0
Fiorentina 1 (Toni 87)
Match played behind closed doors in Rimini

Lazio 2 (Pandev 11, 61)
Torino 0 Att: 16,852

Livorno 2 (Fiore 26, Lucarelli 69)
Messina 1 (Zoro 88)
Match played behind closed doors

Palermo 1 (Di Michele 23)
Chievo 1 (Obinna 46) Att: 22,057

Parma 0
Sampdoria 1 (Quagliarella 58) Att: 13,523

Reggina 1 (Lucarelli 64)
Atalanta 1 (Talamonti 74) Att: 9,167

Saturday, February 24
Atalanta 1 (Zampagna 13)
Palermo 1 (Diana 59) Att: 12,230

Chievo 3 (Bogdani 2, 45, Brighi 49)
Torino 0 Att: 5,000

Sunday, February 25
Cagliari 0
Lazio 2 (Cribari 21, Rocchi 34) Att: 12,500

Catania 2 (Spinesi 65, Corona 74)
Inter 5 (Samuel 45, Solari 49, Grosso 57, Ibrahimovic 67, Cruz 77)
Match played behind closed doors in Cesena

Fiorentina 2 (Mutu 27, Toni 75)
Empoli 0 Att: 23,900

Livorno 0
Ascoli 0 Att: 7,500

Messina 1 (Alvarez 90)
Siena 0 Att: 7,000

Milan 1 (Ambrosini 90)
Sampdoria 0 Att: 67,500

Roma 3 (Tavano 55, Mexes 65, Panucci 90)
Reggina 0 Att: 45,650

Udinese 3 (Di Natale 41, pen 68, Obodo 84)
Parma 3 (Budan 8, Parravicini 78, G Rossi pen 86) Att: 13,600

Wednesday, February 28
Ascoli 0
Parma 0 Att: 4,800

Chievo 2 (Bogdani 17, Semioli 33)
Roma 2 (Totti 34, 50) Att: 4,221

Empoli 3 (Saudati 14, 64, Marzoratti 35)
Messina 1 (Alvarez 90) Att: 3,517

Inter 1 (Crespo 67)
Udinese 1 (Obodo 48) Att: 38,496

Lazio 3 (Pandev 65, Siviglia 90, Rocchi 90)
Catania 1 (Colucci 17) Att: 16,241

Palermo 0
Milan 0 Att: 25,361

Reggina 1 (Foggia 59)
Fiorentina 1 (Mutu pen 89) Att: 10,471

Sampdoria 2 (Bazzani 73, Volpi pen 85)
Atalanta 1 (Ventola 8) Att: 16,778

Siena 0
Livorno 0 Att: 6,164

Torino 1 (Bovo 23)
Cagliari 0 Att: 19,378

Saturday, March 3
Ascoli 1 (Soncin 31)
Roma 1 (Wilhelmsson 86) Att: 4,787

Livorno 1 (Lucarelli 27)
Inter 2 (Cruz 35, Ibrahimovic 67) Att: 5,641

Milan 3 (Gilardino 33, Oddo 57, Seedorf 90)
Chievo 1 (Pellissier 17) Att: 41,072

Sunday, March 4
Cagliari 2 (Suazo 4, Pepe 73)
Atalanta 0 Att: 5,000

Catania 1 (Corona 59)
Siena 1 (Cozza 76)
Match played behind closed doors in Rimini

Fiorentina 5 (Toni 31, 34, Franceschini og 53, Gamberini 75, 84)
Torino 1 (Rosina 15) Att: 23,000

Lazio 1 (Rocchi 23)
Sampdoria 0 Att: 20,050

Messina 2 (Rigano 45, 67)
Palermo 0 Att: 11,521

Parma 2 (Budan 23, G Rossi pen 90)
Reggina 2 (Bianchi 14, 40) Att: 12,672

Udinese 0
Empoli 1 (Pozzi 18) Att: 13,652

ITALY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Inter	26	22	4	0	57	21	70
Roma	26	16	6	4	52	21	54
Palermo	27	13	6	8	41	32	45
Lazio*	26	13	7	6	41	19	43
Empoli	26	11	8	7	25	22	41
Milan*	26	13	9	4	36	22	40
Fiorentina*	26	15	5	6	44	23	35
Sampdoria	26	9	6	11	33	33	33
Udinese	26	8	8	10	29	34	32
Catania	27	8	8	11	35	49	32
Atalanta	26	7	10	9	39	38	31
Livorno	26	6	10	10	25	37	28
Siena*	26	5	13	8	24	30	27
Cagliari	26	5	11	10	20	29	26
Torino	26	6	7	13	20	39	25
Chievo	26	5	8	13	28	38	23
Messina	26	5	8	13	27	42	23
Reggina*	26	8	9	9	32	36	22
Parma	26	3	9	14	22	45	18
Ascoli	26	2	10	14	19	39	16

**Milan had 8pts deducted, Lazio 3pts, Reggina 11pts and Fiorentina 15pts for their part in the country's match-fixing scandal. Siena had 1pt deducted for late payment of taxes*

LEADING GOALSCORERS
16 Francesco Totti (Roma)
15 Luca Toni (Fiorentina)
14 Rolando Bianchi (Reggina)
12 Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Inter)
12 Adrian Mutu (Fiorentina)
12 Tommaso Rocchi (Lazio)
12 Gionatha Spinesi (Catania)

POLAND

Mar 2: Belchatow 6 Gornik L 0; Cracovia 0 Legia 0.
Mar 3: Wisla P 1 Lech 1; Korona 1 Arka 0; Pogon 0 LKS 1; Groclin 0 Widzew 0; Zaglebie 1 Odra 0.
Mar 4: Gornik Z 0 Wisla K 4.

POLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Belchatow	16	10	3	3	37	17	33
Korona	16	9	3	4	25	15	30
Zaglebie	16	8	6	2	21	15	30
Wisla K	16	7	7	2	30	13	28
Legia	16	8	4	4	29	16	28
LKS	16	7	6	3	20	15	27
Lech	16	5	7	4	30	22	22
Cracovia	16	6	4	6	20	25	22
Groclin	16	3	11	2	17	15	20
Arka	16	3	9	4	18	17	18
Widzew	16	4	4	8	16	21	16
Gornik Z	16	4	3	9	16	28	15
Pogon	16	3	5	8	14	20	14
Gornik L	16	3	5	8	9	32	14
Odra	16	2	6	8	13	27	12
Wisla P	16	1	7	8	12	31	10

PORTUGAL

Friday, February 16
FC Porto 4 (Lopez 20, 47, Gonzalez 36, Adriano 90)
Naval 0

Saturday, February 17
Boavista 1 (Grzelak 58)
Setubal 1 (Ayew 84)

Pacos Ferreira 1 (Cristiano 71)
Sporting Lisbon 1 (Liedson 51)

Sunday, February 18
Aves 1 (Filipe Oliveira og 45)
Maritimo 1 (Diogo Valente 22)

Estrela Amadora 2 (Luis Loureiro 8, Marco Paulo 16)
Beira Mar 2 (Alcaraz 40, Edgar 45)

Nacional 0
Benfica 2 (Miccoli 62, 71)

Uniao Leiria 1 (Slusarski 90)
Sporting Braga 0

Monday, February 19
Belenenses 1 (Nivaldo 71)
Academica 2 (Alvarez 70, Lino 86)

Friday, February 23
Sporting Lisbon 0
Aves 0

Saturday, February 24
Academica 0
Boavista 2 (Grzelak 23, Kazmierczak 43)

Naval 2 (Lito 38, Gaucho 51)
Belenenses 3 (Nivaldo 1, Dady 11, Jose Pedro 72)

Sunday, February 25
Beira Mar 0
FC Porto 5 (Lopez 18, Gonzalez 71, Raul Meireles 74, Alan 77, Adriano pen 88)

Setubal 1 (Byong 84)
Nacional 1 (Diego Benaglio 54)

Monday, February 26
Benfica 3 (Simao 8, 64, Nuno Gomes 33)
Pacos Ferreira 1 (Fahel 45)

Maritimo 2 (Mbesuma 45, Laranjeiro og 79)
Uniao Leiria 1 (Marcos Antonio 4)

Sporting Braga 2 (Paulo Jorge pen 36, Wender 89)
Estrela Amadora 1 (Fonte 11)

Friday, March 2
Pacos Ferreira 1 (Joao Paulo pen 11)
Setubal 0

Saturday, March 3
Aves 0
Benfica 1 (Nuno Gomes 59)

FC Porto 1 (Adriano 8)
Sporting Braga 0

Sunday, March 4
Beira Mar 1 (Edgar 64)
Naval 3 (Saulo 57, Nei pen 81, 87)

Estrela Amadora 1 (N'Diaye 22)
Maritimo 0

Nacional 4 (Chainho 30, Cassio 47, 88, Diego 83)
Academica 0

Uniao Leiria 0
Sporting Lisbon 0

Monday, March 5
Boavista 0
Belenenses 0

PORTUGAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FC Porto	20	16	1	3	44	10	49
Benfica	20	14	3	3	40	15	45
Sporting Lisbon	20	11	7	2	29	12	40
Sporting Braga	20	9	4	7	26	25	31
Uniao Leiria	20	8	5	7	16	18	29
Pacos Ferreira	20	7	8	5	22	26	29
Nacional	20	8	4	8	30	26	28
Belenenses	20	6	4	8	21	20	26
Maritimo	20	8	4	8	23	25	28
Naval	20	7	6	7	20	21	27
Boavista	20	5	9	6	22	22	24
E Amadora	20	6	6	8	14	21	24
Academica	20	5	4	11	21	32	19
Setubal	20	3	5	12	11	29	14
Beira Mar	20	2	7	11	19	41	13
Aves	20	2	5	13	11	26	11

LEADING GOALSCORERS
9 Helder Postiga (FC Porto)
9 Simao Sabrosa (Benfica)
8 Liedson (Sporting Lisbon)
8 Nei (Naval)

PORTUGUESE CUP – last 16

Feb 10: Atletico 0 Academica 1; Boavista 2 Nacional 0; Maia 0 Beira Mar 2; Naval 0 Braganca 1; Odivelas 0 Belenenses 1; Pinhalnovense 0 Sporting Lisbon 6; Varzim 2 Benfica 1.
Bye to quarter-finals: Sporting Braga

Quarter-finals

Feb 28: Beira Mar 2 Boavista 0 (aet); Braganca 1 Belenenses 2; Sporting Lisbon 2 Academica 1.
Still to play: Sporting Braga v Varzim (Mar 25)

ROMANIA

Feb 23: Poli Iasi 1 National 1; Otelul 3 Urziceni 2.
Feb 24: Arges 0 U Craiova 0; Farul 1 Vaslui 1; CFR Cluj 1 Ceahlaul 1.
Feb 25: Steaua 0 UTA 0; Rapid 2 Poli Timisoara 0; Gloria 2 Pandurii 0.
Feb 26: Dinamo 1 Jiul 0.
Mar 2: Jiul 0 Gloria 1.
Mar 3: UTA 0 Arges 0; U Craiova 0 Rapid 0; National 0 CFR Cluj 1; Urziceni 0 Farul 1.
Mar 4: Vaslui 1 Steaua 0; Ceahlaul 4 Otelul 3; Poli Timisoara 1 Dinamo 1; Pandurii 1 Poli Iasi 0.

ROMANIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo	21	18	2	1	43	11	56
Steaua	21	11	7	3	37	11	40
Rapid	21	11	7	3	35	14	40
CFR Cluj	21	12	4	5	40	25	40
Gloria	21	11	3	7	27	19	36
Poli Timisoara	21	9	6	6	21	17	33
Vaslui	21	9	5	7	27	30	32
Otelul	21	9	3	9	30	38	30
UTA	21	7	5	9	17	20	26
Pandurii	21	7	5	9	16	22	26
U Craiova	21	6	8	7	22	33	26
Farul	21	6	7	8	22	22	25
Poli Iasi	21	6	7	8	23	28	25
Urziceni	21	6	4	11	16	23	22
Ceahlaul	21	6	3	12	18	33	21
Arges	21	4	4	13	13	26	16
Jiul	21	3	5	13	9	26	14
National	21	3	5	13	14	32	14

SCOTLAND

Saturday, February 10
Aberdeen 3 (Mackie 33, Nicholson pen 58, Lovell 83)
Dunfermline 0 Att: 9,379

Celtic 1 (Beattie 54)
Hibernian 0 Att: 59,659

Falkirk 1 (Cregg 47)
Motherwell 2 (McDonald 66, D Smith 67) Att: 4,478

Hearts 1 (Pospisil 82)
Inverness 0 Att: 16,631

St Mirren 0
Dundee United 1 (Robson 78) Att: 3,849

Sunday, February 11
Kilmarnock 1 (Naismith 73)
Rangers 3 (Boyd pen 9, 30, pen 60) Att: 11,894

Saturday, February 17
Aberdeen 1 (Mackie 90)
Celtic 2 (Beattie 9, Nakamura 20) Att: 16,711

Dunfermline 1 (Crawford pen 45)
Kilmarnock 1 (Naismith 10) Att: 4,500

Hearts 1 (Kingston 71)
St Mirren 1 (O'Donnell 14) Att: 17,195

Motherwell 1 (McDonald 45)
Inverness 0 Att: 4,258

Sunday, February 18
Dundee United 0
Hibernian 0 Att: 6,453

Rangers 2 (Boyd 34, Ferguson 73)
Falkirk 1 (Finnigan 64) Att: 49,850

Tuesday, February 20
St Mirren 0
Motherwell 0 Att: 3,576

Saturday, March 3
Celtic 2 (Miller 4, Vennegoor of Hesselink 76)
Dunfermline 1 (Hammill 87) Att: 59,131

Falkirk 1 (Holden 66)
Aberdeen 2 (Dempsey 16, Foster 61) Att: 5,825

Inverness 1 (Wilson 90)
Dundee United 0 Att: 3,901

St Mirren 0
Kilmarnock 2 (Nish 59, 79) Att: 4,778

Sunday, March 4
Hibernian 0
Rangers 2 (Adam 4, 60) Att: 16,265

Monday, March 5
Motherwell 0
Hearts 2 (Tall 37, Craigan og 66) Att: 4,389

SCOTLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Celtic	29	23	5	1	57	22	74
Rangers	29	16	7	6	49	24	55
Aberdeen	28	14	6	8	39	25	48
Hearts	29	13	9	7	38	25	48
Hibernian	29	11	7	11	46	35	40
Kilmarnock	29	11	7	11	38	44	40
Inverness	29	8	10	11	31	37	34
Falkirk	29	10	3	16	36	39	33
Motherwell	28	9	5	14	32	44	32
Dundee Utd	29	8	8	13	29	49	32
St Mirren	29	5	10	14	23	43	25
Dunfermline	29	3	7	19	15	46	16

LEADING GOALSCORERS
16 Kris Boyd (Rangers)
14 Anthony Stokes (Falkirk)
13 Chris Killen (Hibernian)
11 Scott McDonald (Motherwell)
11 Steven Naismith (Kilmarnock)

SCOTTISH CUP – quarter-finals

Feb 24: Dunfermline 2 Partick 0; Queen of the South 1 Hibernian 2.
Feb 25: Inverness 1 Celtic 2.
Feb 28: Motherwell 1 St Johnstone 2.

SERBIA

Feb 17: Borac 0 Smederevo 0; Vojvodina 1 Vozdovac 0; Partizan 1 Mladost 0; Banat 1 OFK 0; Hajduk K 1 Zemun 0.
Feb 18: Bezanija 1 Red Star 1.
Feb 24: Smederevo 2 Bezanija 0; Red Star 2 Partizan 4; Mladost 1 Banat 1; OFK 0 Vojvodina 1; Vozdovac 1 Hajduk K 2; Zemun 0 Borac 2.
Mar 3: Banat 1 Red Star 4; Partizan 2 Smederevo 1; Vojvodina 1 Mladost 1; Bezanija 2 Zemun 0; Borac 0 Hajduk K 3.
Mar 4: OFK 6 Vozdovac 2.

SERBIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Red Star	19	14	3	2	34	13	45
Partizan	19	11	3	5	29	18	36
OFK	19	8	7	4	27	13	31
Mladost	19	8	7	4	18	11	31
Bezanija	19	6	10	3	22	16	28
Vojvodina	19	8	4	7	15	15	28
Hajduk K	19	9	1	9	17	19	28
Banat	19	6	5	8	16	24	23
Smederevo	19	5	7	7	15	18	22
Borac	19	5	5	9	10	16	20
Vozdovac	19	4	5	10	16	29	17
Zemun	19	0	3	16	5	32	3

SPAIN

Saturday, February 10
Betis 0
Sevilla 0 Att: 45,000

Real Sociedad 1 (Aranburu 8)
Real Madrid 2 (Beckham 37, Van Nistelrooy 48) Att: 23,408

Sunday, February 11
Atletico Madrid 1 (Aguero 63)
Athletic Bilbao 0 Att: 20,000

Barcelona 2 (Ronaldinho 50, 66)
Racing Santander 0 Att: 75,631

Celta Vigo 0
Espanyol 2 (Pandiani 56, Luis Garcia 72) Att: 10,000

Getafe 3 (Mario Cotelo 45, Guiza 57, Nacho Perez 78)
Valencia 0 Att: 12,000

Gimnastic 2 (Portillo 33, Cesar Navas 58)
Osasuna 3 (Cuellar 12, Soldado 70, 74) Att: 12,000

Levante 2 (Salva 16, 41)
Recreativo 1 (Sinama-Pongolle pen 54) Att: 14,751

Mallorca 2 (Nunes 56, Jankovic 82)
Zaragoza 1 (D Milito 54) Att: 15,000

Villarreal 0
Deportivo La Coruna 2 (Marcos Senna og 19, Verdu 78) Att: 20,000

Saturday, February 17
Real Madrid 0
Betis 0 Att: 75,000

Zaragoza 1 (D Milito 32)
Villarreal 0 Att: 23,000

Sunday, February 18
Athletic Bilbao 2 (Aduritz 29, 49)
Getafe 0 Att: 37,000

Deportivo La Coruna 0
Levante 0 Att: 12,000

Espanyol 3 (Luis Garcia 29, 78, Eduardo Costa 90)
Mallorca 0 Att: 18,550

Osasuna 0
Celta Vigo 1 (Fernando Baiano 2) Att: 15,647

Racing Santander 4 (Scaloni 60, Matellan og 67, Colsa 75, Zigic 82)
Gimnastic 1 (Grahn 58) Att: 14,077

Recreativo 1 (Beto 48)
Real Sociedad 0 Att: 16,000

Sevilla 3 (Kanoute 14, 73, Daniel Alves 21)
Atletico Madrid 1 (Pablo Ibanez 81) Att: 42,000

Valencia 2 (Angulo 52, Silva 55)
Barcelona 1 (Ronaldinho 90) Att: 50,000

Saturday, February 24
Atletico Madrid 1 (Fernando Torres 12)
Real Madrid 1 (Higuain 62) Att: 56,000

Real Sociedad 0
Deportivo La Coruna 1 (Arizmendi 28) Att: 24,424

Sunday, February 25
Barcelona 3 (Amorebieta og 23, Xavi 30, Eto'o 42)
Athletic Bilbao 0 Att: 64,804

Betis 0
Recreativo 0 Att: 40,000

Celta Vigo 2 (Fernando Baiano pen 24, Bamogo 32)
Racing Santander 2 (Munitis 54, Alvarez pen 78) Att: 13,500

Getafe 0
Sevilla 0 Att: 12,000

Gimnastic 1 (Ruben Castro 90)
Valencia 1 (Joaquin 62) Att: 14,000

Levante 0
Zaragoza 0 Att: 11,552

Osasuna 0
Espanyol 2 (Corominas 13, Tamudo 65) Att: 16,165

Villarreal 2 (Tomasson 37, Fuentes 89)
Mallorca 1 (Pereyra 25) Att: 19,000

Saturday, March 3
Sevilla 2 (Kerzhakov 38, Daniel Alves 60)
Barcelona 1 (Ronaldinho 13) Att: 45,500

Valencia 1 (Morientes 66)
Celta Vigo 0 Att: 40,000

Sunday, March 4
Athletic Bilbao 0
Gimnastic 2 (Portillo 37, Pinilla 71) Att: 38,000

Deportivo La Coruna 0
Betis 1 (Fernando 79) Att: 12,000

Espanyol 1 (Tamudo 28)
Villarreal 1 (Forlan 53) Att: 19,544

Mallorca 3 (Jankovic 47, Victor 50, Arango 90)
Levante 1 (Kapo 54) Att: 19,000

Racing Santander 1 (Juanjo 78)
Osasuna 0 Att: 16,123

Real Madrid 1 (Van Nistelrooy pen 44)
Getafe 1 (Guiza 37) Att: 75,000

Recreativo 1 (Sinama-Pongolle pen 9)
Atletico Madrid 0 Att: 18,000

Zaragoza 3 (Aimar 52, D Milito pen 74, Ewerthon 81)
Real Sociedad 2 (Herrera 17, Diaz de Cerio 90) Att: 27,000

SPAIN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sevilla	25	15	5	5	46	23	50
Barcelona	25	14	7	4	50	22	49
Valencia	25	14	4	7	36	23	46
Real Madrid	25	13	5	7	32	21	44
Zaragoza	25	12	6	7	38	26	42
Atletico Madrid	25	11	7	7	30	22	40
Recreativo	25	12	4	9	34	30	40
Getafe	25	10	7	8	22	17	37
Espanyol	25	9	9	7	27	26	36
R Santander	25	9	9	7	27	29	36
Dep La Coruna	25	8	9	8	19	26	33
Villarreal	25	9	6	10	23	31	33
Osasuna	25	9	3	13	30	32	30
Betis	25	7	9	9	24	28	30
Mallorca	25	8	5	12	25	36	29
Levante	25	6	9	10	22	34	27
Celta Vigo	25	6	8	11	26	35	26
Athletic Bilbao	25	6	7	12	26	36	25
Gimnastic	25	4	5	16	27	48	17
Real Sociedad	25	2	8	15	15	34	14

LEADING GOALSCORERS
18 Frederic Kanoute (Sevilla)
17 Ronaldinho (Barcelona)
16 Diego Milito (Zaragoza)
12 Ruud Van Nistelrooy (Real Madrid)

SPANISH CUP – quarter-finals

1st legs - Jan 31; 2nd legs - Feb 28
Barcelona v Zaragoza 0-1, 2-1 (agg 2-2; Barcelona on away goals)
Dep La Coruna v Valladolid 4-1, 1-1 (agg 5-2)
Getafe v Osasuna 3-0, 0-1 (agg 3-1)
Sevilla v Betis 0-0, (*second leg suspended in 56th minute with Sevilla winning 1-0; remaining 34 minutes to be played on Mar 20 at Getafe)*

SWITZERLAND

Feb 10: Grasshopper 0 Zurich 0; St Gallen 1 Aarau 0.
Feb 11: Lucerne 2 Sion 0; Young Boys 0 Basle 3; Schaffhausen 1 Thun 2.
Feb 17: Basle 1 Lucerne 0; Zurich 1 Young Boys 0; Thun 0 Grasshopper 2.
Feb 18: Sion 0 St Gallen 2; Aarau 3 Schaffhausen 2.
Feb 24: Lucerne 2 Zurich 0; Grasshopper 1 Aarau 0.
Feb 25: Young Boys 3 Thun 1; Sion 0 Basle 0; Schaffhausen 0 St Gallen 1.
Mar 3: Young Boys 2 Sion 0; St Gallen 0 Lucerne 0.
Mar 4: Schaffhausen 0 Zurich 4; Grasshopper 1 Basle 5; Aarau 0 Thun 0.

SWITZERLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zurich	22	15	2	5	43	19	47
St Gallen	22	13	3	6	33	24	42
Basle	22	12	4	6	48	32	40
Grasshopper	22	11	5	6	38	24	38
Young Boys	22	11	3	8	35	28	36
Sion	22	9	6	7	35	32	33
Lucerne	22	7	5	10	23	27	26
Thun	22	4	6	12	14	40	18
Schaffhausen	22	3	6	13	21	42	15
Aarau	22	4	2	16	16	38	14

TURKEY

Feb 10: Ankaragucu 0 Kayserispor 4; Rizespor 2 Fenerbahce 1; Besiktas 2 Denizlispor 0.
Feb 11: Genclerbirligi 1 Bursaspor 0; Erciyesspor 1 Ankaraspor 0; Antalyaspor 1 Konyaspor 0; Sakaryaspor 1 Sivasspor 3; Trabzonspor 2 Gaziantepspor 0; Galatasaray 4 Manisaspor 0.
Feb 16: Konyaspor 2 Besiktas 1.
Feb 17: Bursaspor 1 Rizespor 0; Gaziantepspor 1 Galatasaray 0.
Feb 18: Kayserispor 1 Erciyesspor 0; Manisaspor 0 Ankaragucu 1; Ankaraspor 1 Genclerbirligi 2; Sivasspor 0 Antalyaspor 1; Denizlispor 3 Trabzonspor 4; Fenerbahce 1 Sakaryaspor 0.
Feb 23: Erciyesspor 1 Manisaspor 0; Galatasaray 1 Denizlispor 1.
Feb 24: Trabzonspor 3 Besiktas 2; Ankaragucu 2 Gaziantepspor 1.
Feb 25: Antalyaspor 1 Fenerbahce 0; Sakaryaspor 1 Bursaspor 3; Rizespor 1 Ankaraspor 1; Genclerbirligi 2 Kayserispor 2; Sivasspor 1 Konyaspor 3.
Mar 2: Bursaspor 0 Antalyaspor 0.
Mar 3: Besiktas 2 Galatasaray 1; Kayserispor 1 Rizespor 0; Denizlispor 1 Ankaragucu 0.
Mar 4: Gaziantepspor 0 Erciyesspor 1; Manisaspor 0 Genclerbirligi 3; Ankaraspor 1 Sakaryaspor 0; Konyaspor 1 Trabzonspor 2; Fenerbahce 2 Sivasspor 2.

TURKEY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fenerbahce	23	13	6	4	42	22	45
Besiktas	23	11	6	6	33	23	39
Galatasaray	23	10	8	5	40	24	38
Kayserispor	23	10	8	5	30	22	38
Genclerbirligi	23	11	4	8	29	24	37
Konyaspor	23	9	7	7	31	27	34
Trabzonspor	23	9	6	8	31	27	33
Bursaspor	23	9	6	8	26	24	33
Sivasspor	23	9	5	9	25	29	32
Ankaraspor	23	6	12	5	25	24	30
Antalyaspor	23	7	9	7	22	22	30
Ankaragucu	23	7	8	8	24	24	29
Manisaspor	23	8	5	10	33	35	29
Gaziantepspor	23	7	6	10	22	30	27
Rizespor	23	7	4	12	18	25	25
Denizlispor	23	5	8	10	19	29	23
Erciyesspor	23	5	7	11	19	40	22
Sakaryaspor	23	3	7	13	13	31	16

UKRAINE

Mar 3: Shakhtar 3 Zorya 0; Dnipro 1 Illichivets 1.
Mar 4: Tavriya 1 Vorskla 0; Chornomorets 2 Arsenal 0; Dynamo 3 Metalurh Z 1; Karpaty 1 Kryvbas 1; FC Kharkiv 0 Metalist 0; Stal 3 Metalurh D 0.

UKRAINE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dynamo	17	14	3	0	41	13	45
Shakhtar	17	13	2	2	39	6	41
Metalist	17	8	6	3	18	13	30
Arsenal	17	6	7	4	18	19	25
Dnipro	17	5	10	2	15	10	25
Tavriya	17	7	3	7	15	15	24
Karpaty	17	6	6	5	14	17	24
Chornomorets	17	6	5	6	22	23	23
Metalurh D	17	5	6	6	14	19	21
Kryvbas	17	4	9	4	18	20	21
Vorskla	17	4	4	9	12	18	16
Illichivets	17	4	4	9	14	21	16
Metalurh Z	17	3	7	7	10	21	16
FC Kharkiv	17	3	5	9	14	27	14
Stal	17	3	3	11	13	21	12
Zorya	17	2	6	9	13	27	12

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

Group 1

Feb 20
El Nacional (Ecu) 1 (Benitez 27)
America (Mex) 2 (Fernandez 41, Villa 46)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Duarte (Col)
Sent off: Hidalgo (El Nacional) 76min

Feb 20
Libertad (Par) 1 (Riveros 85)
Banfield (Arg) 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Lopes (Bra)

Feb 27
Banfield 4 (Cvitanich 8, Andrizzi 24, 29, Lucchetti pen 65)
El Nacional 1 (Calderon 22)
HT: 3-1. **Ref:** Gaciba (Bra)
Sent off: Quinonez (El Nacional) 85min

Mar 1
America 1 (Cuevas 41)
Libertad 4 (Aquino 3, P Benitez 20, 79, Lopez 45)
HT: 1-3. **Ref:** Silvera (Uru)

Mar 6
El Nacional 1 (Calderon 68)
Libertad 1 (Lopez 79)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ruiz (Col)
Sent off: Caicedo (El Nacional) 81min

Mar 7
America 4 (O Rojas 20, Cabanas 23, 48, Mosqueda 52)
Banfield 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Chandia (Chl)

GROUP 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Libertad	3	2	1	0	6	2	7
America	3	2	0	1	7	5	6
Banfield	3	1	0	2	4	6	3
El Nacional	3	0	1	2	3	7	1

Feb 20 El Nacional-America 1-2
Feb 20 Libertad-Banfield 1-0
Feb 27 Banfield-El Nacional 4-1
Mar 1 America-Libertad 1-4
Mar 6 El Nacional-Libertad 1-1
Mar 7 America-Banfield 4-0
Mar 21 Banfield-America
Mar 22 Libertad-El Nacional
Apr 3 El Nacional-Banfield
Apr 11 Libertad-America
Apr 18 Banfield-Libertad
Apr 18 America-El Nacional

Group 2

Feb 14
Audax Italiano (Chl) 0
Sao Paulo (Bra) 0
Ref: Silvera (Uru)

Feb 20
Alianza Lima (Per) 1 (Liguera 57)
Necaxa (Mex) 2 (Moreno 17, Salgueiro 32)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Gamboa (Bol)

Feb 28
Necaxa 2 (Kleber Boas 8, A Padilla 69)
Audax Italiano 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Vazquez (Uru)

Feb 28
Sao Paulo 4 (Alex Silva 14, 70, Leandro 57, Junior 87)
Alianza Lima 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Pezzotta (Arg)

GROUP 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Necaxa	2	2	0	0	4	1	6
Sao Paulo	2	1	1	0	4	0	4
Audax Italiano	2	0	1	1	0	2	1
Alianza Lima	2	0	0	2	1	6	0

Feb 14 Audax Italiano-Sao Paulo 0-0
Feb 20 Alianza Lima-Necaxa 1-2
Feb 28 Necaxa-Audax Italiano 2-0
Feb 28 Sao Paulo-Alianza Lima 4-0
Mar 13 Alianza Lima-Audax Italiano
Mar 21 Necaxa-Sao Paulo
Mar 29 Audax Italiano-Alianza Lima
Apr 4 Sao Paulo-Necaxa
Apr 11 Audax Italiano-Necaxa
Apr 18 Alianza Lima-Sao Paulo
Apr 25 Sao Paulo-Audax Italiano
Apr 25 Necaxa-Alianza Lima

Group 3

Feb 13
Cucuta (Col) 0
Tolima (Col) 0
Ref: Hoyos (Col)
Sent off: Martinez (Tolima) 58min

Feb 15
Cerro Porteno (Par) 0
Gremio (Bra) 1 (Lucas 52)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Baldassi (Arg)

Feb 27
Gremio 0
Cucuta 0
Ref: Pozo (Chl)

Mar 7
Tolima 1 (Quintero 63)
Cerro Porteno 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Rivera (Per)

GROUP 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gremio	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Tolima	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Cucuta	2	0	2	0	0	0	2
Cerro Porteno	2	0	0	2	0	2	0

Feb 13 Cucuta-Tolima 0-0
Feb 15 Cerro Porteno-Gremio 0-1
Feb 27 Gremio-Cucuta 0-0
Mar 7 Tolima-Cerro Porteno 1-0
Mar 13 Cucuta-Cerro Porteno
Mar 15 Tolima-Gremio
Mar 20 Cerro Porteno-Cucuta
Mar 27 Gremio-Tolima
Apr 10 Cerro Porteno-Tolima
Apr 11 Cucuta-Gremio
Apr 24 Gremio-Cerro Porteno
Apr 24 Tolima-Cucuta

Group 4

Feb 13
Emelec (Ecu) 0
Velez Sarsfield (Arg) 1 (Bustamante 13)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Arias (Par)

Feb 21
Nacional (Uru) 3 (Vera 72, Delgado 75, Martinez 90)
Internacional (Bra) 1 (Hidalgo 37)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Pezzotta (Arg)
Sent off: Rodriguez (Nacional) 61min; Wellington Monteiro (Internacional) 74min

Feb 28
Internacional 3 (Perdigao 26, Indio 55, Alexandre Pato 66)
Emelec 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Selman (Chl)

Feb 28
Velez Sarsfield 1 (Escudero 45)
Nacional 1 (Vera 46)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Fagundes (Bra)

GROUP 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nacional	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
Velez Sarsfield	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Internacional	2	1	0	1	4	3	3
Emelec	2	0	0	2	0	4	0

Feb 13 Emelec-Velez Sarsfield 0-1
Feb 21 Nacional-Internacional 3-1
Feb 28 Internacional-Emelec 3-0
Feb 28 Velez Sarsfield-Nacional 1-1
Mar 14 Velez Sarsfield-Internacional
Mar 22 Emelec-Nacional
Mar 28 Internacional-Velez Sarsfield
Apr 3 Nacional-Emelec
Apr 10 Emelec-Internacional
Apr 12 Nacional-Velez Sarsfield
Apr 19 Internacional-Nacional
Apr 19 Velez Sarsfield-Emelec

Group 5

Feb 14
Real Potosi (Bol) 2 (Monteiro 13, Aguilera 43)
Flamengo (Bra) 2 (Roni 48, Obina 66)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Rivera (Per)

Feb 15
UA Maracaibo (Ven) 2 (Arismendi 44, Casseres 66)
Parana (Bra) 4 (Josiel 38, Dinelson 55, Henrique 56, Gerson 68)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Haro (Ecu)

Feb 21
Parana 2 (Dinelson 62, Daniel Marques 73)
Real Potosi 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Laverni (Arg)
Sent off: M D Paz (Potosi) 60min

Feb 21
Flamengo 3 (Renato 16, Souza 36, Obina 45)
UA Maracaibo 1 (Arismendi 89)
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Osses (Chl)

GROUP 5

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Parana	2	2	0	0	6	2	6
Flamengo	2	1	1	0	5	3	4
Real Potosi	2	0	1	1	2	4	1
UA Maracaibo	2	0	0	2	3	7	0

Feb 14 Real Potosi-Flamengo 2-2
Feb 15 UA Maracaibo-Parana 2-4
Feb 21 Parana-Real Potosi 2-0
Feb 21 Flamengo-UA Maracaibo 3-1
Mar 13 UA Maracaibo-Real Potosi
Mar 14 Parana-Flamengo
Mar 20 Real Potosi-UA Maracaibo
Mar 21 Flamengo-Parana
Apr 4 UA Maracaibo-Flamengo
Apr 10 Real Potosi-Parana
Apr 18 Flamengo-Real Potosi
Apr 18 Parana-UA Maracaibo

Group 6

Feb 22
Caracas (Ven) 1 (Guerra 75)
LDU Quito (Ecu) 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Carrillo (Per)

Feb 22
Colo Colo (Chl) 1 (Suazo 60)
River Plate (Arg) 2 (Ponzio 45, Farias 54)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Torres (Par)
Sent off: Falcao Garcia (River) 65min; Mena (Colo Colo) 89min

Mar 7
LDU Quito 3 (Obregon 46, Salas pen 74, Guerron 85)
Colo Colo 1 (Suazo 32)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Duarte (Col)
Sent off: Henriquez (Colo Colo) 74min; Lara (LDU) 80min

Mar 8
River Plate 0
Caracas 1 (Velasquez 9)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Pozo (Chl)

GROUP 6

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Caracas	2	2	0	0	2	0	6
LDU Quito	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
River Plate	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Colo Colo	2	0	0	2	2	5	0

Feb 22 Caracas-LDU Quito 1-0
Feb 22 Colo Colo-River Plate 1-2
Mar 7 LDU Quito-Colo Colo 3-1
Mar 8 River Plate-Caracas 0-1
Mar 15 LDU Quito-River Plate
Mar 20 Caracas-Colo Colo
Mar 27 Colo Colo-Caracas
Mar 29 River Plate-LDU Quito
Apr 3 Colo Colo-LDU Quito
Apr 5 Caracas-River Plate
Apr 25 River Plate-Colo Colo
Apr 25 LDU Quito-Caracas

Group 7

Feb 14
Bolivar (Bol) 0
Boca Juniors (Arg) 0
Ref: Grance (Par)

Feb 21
Cienciano (Per) 1 (Hernandez 37)
Toluca (Mex) 2 (D J De la Torre 71, Velasco 87)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Reinoso (Ecu)

Feb 27
Toluca 1 (Da Silva 2)
Bolivar 2 (Viglianti 55, Sillero 58)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Andarcia (Ven)

Mar 1
Boca Juniors 1 (Ibarra 81)
Cienciano 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Lopes (Bra)
Sent off: Marino (Boca) 81min

Mar 8
Cienciano 5 (Mostto 64, 80, Marino pen 70, 83, Ruiz 89)
Bolivar 1 (Cuellar 17)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Haro (Ecu)
Sent off: Melgar (Bolivar) 69min

GROUP 7

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Boca Juniors	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Bolivar	3	1	1	1	3	6	4
Cienciano	3	1	0	2	6	4	3
Toluca	2	1	0	1	3	3	3

Feb 14 Bolivar-Boca Juniors 0-0
Feb 21 Cienciano-Toluca 1-2
Feb 27 Toluca-Bolivar 1-2
Mar 1 Boca Juniors-Cienciano 1-0
Mar 8 Cienciano-Bolivar 5-1
Mar 14 Toluca-Boca Juniors
Mar 22 Boca Juniors-Toluca
Mar 28 Bolivar-Cienciano
Apr 4 Cienciano-Boca Juniors
Apr 12 Bolivar-Toluca
Apr 26 Boca Juniors-Bolivar
Apr 26 Toluca-Cienciano

Group 8

Feb 13
Defensor Sporting (Uru) 3 (Ariosa 36, Morales 63, Pereira 72)
Gimnasia La Plata (Arg) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Pozo (Chl)

Feb 21
Deportivo Pasto (Col) 0
Santos (Bra) 1 (Maldonado 61)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Andarcia (Ven)

Mar 1
Santos 1 (Ze Roberto 48)
Defensor Sporting 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Baldassi (Arg)

Mar 6
Gimnasia La Plata 3 (Leal 28, Pacheco 49, Pierguidi 86)
Deportivo Pasto 2 (Rodas 19, Valencia 70)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Selman (Chl)

GROUP 8

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Santos	2	2	0	0	2	0	6
Defensor	2	1	0	1	3	1	3
Gimnasia LP	2	1	0	1	3	5	3
Dep Pasto	2	0	0	2	2	4	0

Feb 13 Defensor-Gimnasia LP 3-0
Feb 21 Dep Pasto-Santos 0-1
Mar 1 Santos-Defensor 1-0
Mar 6 Gimnasia LP-Dep Pasto 3-2
Mar 14 Santos-Gimnasia LP
Mar 15 Dep Pasto-Defensor
Mar 22 Gimnasia LP-Santos
Mar 28 Defensor-Dep Pasto
Apr 5 Defensor-Santos
Apr 5 Dep Pasto-Gimnasia LP
Apr 19 Gimnasia LP-Defensor
Apr 19 Santos-Dep Pasto

Top two in each group qualify for 1st knockout round

ARGENTINA

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Friday, February 9
Gimnasia LP 0
Arsenal 2 (Garnier 59, 81)

Independiente 1 (Denis 60)
Colon Santa Fe 3 (Ramirez 4, Esmerado 9, Sand 41)

Saturday, February 10
Banfield 0
Boca Juniors 4 (Cardozo 8, Morel Rodriguez 21, Orteman 36, Ibarra 70)

Velez Sarsfield 2 (Escudero 5, Zarate 35)
Newell's Old Boys 0

Sunday, February 11
Godoy Cruz 2 (Arzuaga 19, Perez 41)
Argentinos Juniors 0

Nueva Chicago 1 (Bergessio og 28)
Racing Club 1 (Sava 85)

River Plate 1 (Tuzzio 90)
Lanus 0

Rosario Central 1 (Ledesma 75)
Belgrano 0

San Lorenzo 2 (Bottinelli 24, Ferreyra 26)
Gimnasia J 1 (Gomez 32)

Monday, February 12
Estudiantes 2 (Pavone pen 55, Calderon 61)
Quilmes 0

Friday, February 16
Belgrano 0
Independiente 0

Lanus 2 (Sanguinetti og 35, Pelletieri 71)
Banfield 1 (Cvitanich 51)

Saturday, February 17
Arsenal 2 (Ortiz 6, San Martin 58)
Godoy Cruz 1 (Devaca 38)

Colon Santa Fe 1 (Centurion 15)
San Lorenzo 1 (Ledesma 85)

Gimnasia J 0
Estudiantes 0

Newell's Old Boys 1 (Spolli 45)
River Plate 2 (Farias 37, 70)

Sunday, February 18
Argentinos Juniors 3 (Desabato 43, Nunez 67, Aban 90)
Nueva Chicago 0

Boca Juniors 1 (Palacio 55)
Rosario Central 1 (Zelaya 39)

Quilmes 2 (Ibanez 41, 61)
Gimnasia LP 2 (Piatti 10, Pierguidi 83)

Racing Club 2 (Fileppi 71, Sava 75)
Velez Sarsfield 2 (Zarate 25, Moreno y Fabianesi 90)

Friday, February 23
Estudiantes 2 (Calderon 12, Pavone 69)
Colon Santa Fe 2 (Sand 21, Ramirez pen 58)

Nueva Chicago 0
Arsenal 4 (Obolo 12, 51, Mouche 66, Raymonda 78)

Saturday, February 24
Independiente 1 (Armenteros 23)
Boca Juniors 3 (Cardozo 42, Palacio 43, Palermo 90)

Rosario Central 1 (Raldes 11)
Banfield 1 (Cvitanich 64)

Velez Sarsfield 0
Argentinos Juniors 2 (Desabato 68, Nunez 75)

Sunday, February 25
Gimnasia LP 2 (Leguizamon 39, Ormeno 89)
Gimnasia J 0

Godoy Cruz 3 (Herbella 67, Arzuaga 83, Perez 86)
Quilmes 0

Lanus 3 (Ribonetto pen 16, Acosta 50, Pelletieri pen 81)
Newell's Old Boys 2 (Peralta 7, Cardozo 55)

River Plate 4 (Falcao Garcia 3, 49, Galvan 59, Zapata 84)
Racing Club 2 (Sosa 39, Moralez 61)

San Lorenzo 1 (Jimenez 42)
Belgrano 0

Friday, March 2
Colon Santa Fe 1 (Ramirez 63)
Gimnasia LP 2 (Silva 4, 36)

Racing Club 0
Newell's Old Boys 1 (Spolli 20)

Saturday, March 3
Banfield 2 (Villarreal 74, Salvatierra 83)
Independiente 1 (Eluchans 33)

Belgrano 1 (Oyola 55)
Estudiantes 2 (Piatti 37, Calderon 90)

Sunday, March 4
Argentinos Juniors 2 (Carrera 26, Hauche 53)
River Plate 1 (Ruben 18)

Arsenal 3 (Bustamante og 10, Valdemarin 46, Casteglione 77)
Velez Sarsfield 1 (Uglessich 40)

Boca Juniors 0
San Lorenzo 3 (Lavezzi 20, Fernandez 66, Silvera 70)

Gimnasia J 2 (Gandin 69, Quinteros pen 90)
Godoy Cruz 1 (Arzuaga pen 24)

Quilmes 1 (Torres 11)
Nueva Chicago 0

Rosario Central 2 (Di Maria 40, Zelaya 43)
Lanus 3 (Ribonetto pen 23, Pelletieri 75, Fabbiani 90)

ARGENTINA – CLOSING

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Arsenal	4	4	0	0	11	2	12
San Lorenzo	4	3	1	0	7	2	10
Argentinos Jnrs	4	3	0	1	7	3	9
River Plate	4	3	0	1	8	5	9
Lanus	4	3	0	1	8	6	9
Estudiantes	4	2	2	0	6	3	8
Boca Juniors	4	2	1	1	8	5	7
Gimnasia LP	4	2	1	1	6	5	7
Godoy Cruz	4	2	0	2	7	4	6
Colon Santa Fe	4	1	2	1	7	6	5
Rosario Central	4	1	2	1	5	5	5
Velez Sarsfield	4	1	1	2	5	7	4
Gimnasia J	4	1	1	2	3	5	4
Banfield	4	1	1	2	4	8	4
Quilmes	4	1	1	2	3	7	4
Newell's OB	4	1	0	3	4	7	3
Racing Club	4	0	2	2	5	8	2
Belgrano	4	0	1	3	1	4	1
Independiente	4	0	1	3	3	8	1
Nueva Chicago	4	0	1	3	1	9	1

LEADING GOALSCORERS
3 Martin Arzuaga (Godoy Cruz)
3 Jose Calderon (Estudiantes)
3 Agustin Pelletieri (Lanus)
3 Ruben Ramirez (Colon Santa Fe)

BOLIVIA

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Mar 6: The Strongest 6 Destroyers 2.
Mar 7: La Paz 1 Blooming 0; Real Potosi 2 Jorge Wilstermann 1; Universitario 2 Aurora 4.
Mar 8: Oriente 1 San Jose 0.

BOLIVIA – OPENING

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
The Strongest	1	1	0	0	6	2	3
Aurora	1	1	0	0	4	2	3
Real Potosi	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
La Paz	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Oriente	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Bolivar	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Real Mamore	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
J Wilstermann	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Blooming	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
San Jose	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Universitario	1	0	0	1	2	4	0
Destroyers	1	0	0	1	2	6	0

CHILE

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Feb 10: Dep Concepcion 1 Dep La Serena 1; Dep Melipilla 2 Union Espanola 1; Santiago Wanderers 0 Antofagasta 0; Coquimbo Unido 0 Colo Colo 3.
Feb 11: Cobreloa 3 Huachipato 1; Cobresal 2 O'Higgins 0; Lota Schwager 1 Nublense 1; Univ Catolica 2 Palestino 0; Everton 2 Univ de Concepcion 1.
Feb 17: Colo Colo 4 Cobresal 2; Dep La Serena 2 Cobreloa 4; O'Higgins 3 Union Espanola 0; Puerto Montt 2 Univ de Chile 0.
Feb 18: Antofagasta 2 Dep Melipilla 1; Audax Italiano 4 Everton 2; Dep Concepcion 1 Santiago Wanderers 0; Huachipato 1 Nublense 1; Palestino 3 Coquimbo Unido 2; Univ Catolica 2 Lota Schwager 0.
Feb 24: Univ de Chile 0 Dep La Serena 0; Cobreloa 5 O'Higgins 0; Coquimbo Unido 2 Antofagasta 1; Huachipato 3 Dep Concepcion 0; Dep Melipilla 2 Cobresal 0; Union Espanola 2 Audax Italiano 2.
Feb 25: Everton 1 Univ Catolica 0; Nublense 1 Palestino 0; Santiago Wanderers 1 Puerto Montt 1.
Feb 27: Lota Schwager 1 Dep Melipilla 4; Cobresal 1 Cobreloa 0.
Feb 28: Antofagasta 1 Everton 1; Colo Colo 2 Union Espanola 1; Dep La Serena 2 O'Higgins 1; Nublense 3 Univ Catolica 3; Palestino 1 Huachipato 1; Puerto Montt 1 Univ de Concepcion 3; Santiago Wanderers 3 Coquimbo Unido 1.
Mar 1: Dep Concepcion 1 Univ de Chile 0.
Mar 3: O'Higgins 3 Lota Schwager 3; Union Espanola 1 Cobresal 0; Colo Colo 3 Antofagasta 0.
Mar 4: Univ de Concepcion 0 Palestino 0; Cobreloa 2 Puerto Montt 0; Coquimbo Unido 1 Audax Italiano 1; Everton 1 Nublense 2; Huachipato 1 Santiago Wanderers 0; Dep Melipilla 1 Dep Concepcion 1; Univ Catolica 0 Univ de Chile 0.

CHILE – OPENING

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Colo Colo	6	6	0	0	18	4	18
Cobreloa	6	5	0	1	21	5	15
Huachipato	7	4	2	1	11	6	14
Univ Catolica	7	4	2	1	10	5	14
Audax Italiano	5	3	2	0	13	8	11
Dep Melipilla	7	3	2	2	12	8	11
Nublense	7	2	5	0	10	8	11
Everton	7	3	1	3	9	9	10
Union Espanola	7	3	1	3	7	9	10
Puerto Montt	6	2	2	2	7	8	8
D Concepcion	6	2	2	2	4	9	8
O'Higgins	7	2	1	4	10	16	7
Palestino	7	1	3	3	8	11	6
Cobresal	7	2	0	5	6	11	6
U Concepcion	5	1	2	2	4	4	5
S Wanderers	7	1	2	4	6	8	5
Univ de Chile	5	1	2	2	1	3	5
Dep La Serena	6	1	2	3	8	9	5
Coquimbo U'do	7	1	2	4	7	14	5
Antofagasta	6	1	2	3	5	14	5
L Schwager	6	0	3	3	10	16	3

COLOMBIA

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Feb 10: At Nacional 2 Indep Santa Fe 0.
Feb 11: Bucaramanga 2 Chico 1; America 1 La Equidad 1; At Junior 2 At Huila 1; Tolima 0 Real Cartagena 0; Dep Pasto 0 Dep Cali 0; Quindio 0 Cucuta 1; Once Caldas 1 Pereira 1.
Feb 17: At Huila 2 At Nacional 2.
Feb 16: Chico 2 Pereira 0; La Equidad 1 Bucaramanga 1; Real Cartagena 1 At Junior 1; Indep Medellin 2 Tolima 1; Dep Cali 2 Millonarios 0; Cucuta 2 Dep Pasto 0; Once Caldas 1 Quindio 0.
Feb 24: Tolima 1 Dep Cali 1.
Feb 25: Pereira 0 Quindio 1; Dep Pasto 3 Once Caldas 2; At Junior 1 Indep Medellin 2; At Nacional 1 Real Cartagena 0; America 2 At Huila 1; Bucaramanga 1 Indep Santa Fe 1; Chico 0 La Equidad 0.
Mar 3: Dep Cali 4 At Junior 1.
Mar 4: La Equidad 3 Pereira 3; Indep Santa Fe 1 Chico 0; At Huila 2 Bucaramanga 1; Real Cartagena 2 America 2; Indep Medellin 2 At Nacional 2; Cucuta 2 Tolima 1; Once Caldas 2 Millonarios 0; Quindio 2 Dep Pasto 0.
Mar 7: Millonarios 1 Cucuta 1.

COLOMBIA – OPENING

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cucuta	5	4	1	0	10	3	13
Dep Cali	5	3	2	0	10	4	11
At Nacional	5	3	2	0	11	7	11
Indep Medellin	4	3	1	0	8	5	10
Chico	5	2	1	2	5	4	7
Once Caldas	5	2	1	2	7	8	7
Bucaramanga	5	1	3	1	6	6	6
Quindio	5	2	0	3	5	5	6
America	4	1	2	1	6	6	5
Tolima	5	1	2	2	6	7	5
Indep Santa Fe	4	1	2	1	2	3	5
At Junior	5	1	2	2	5	8	5
La Equidad	5	0	4	1	8	9	4
Real Cartagena	5	0	4	1	3	4	4
At Huila	5	1	1	3	8	10	4
Dep Pasto	5	1	1	3	4	8	4
Pereira	5	0	3	2	5	8	3
Millonarios	4	0	2	2	1	5	2

ECUADOR

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Feb 10: El Nacional 4 Emelec 2; Imbabura 1 Dep Azogues 1; Dep Cuenca 0 LDU Quito 0.
Feb 11: Olmedo 2 Dep Quito 0; Barcelona 1 Macara 2.
Feb 14: LDU Quito 2 Barcelona 1; Dep Azogues 2 El Nacional 1; Dep Quito 2 Dep Cuenca 1; Macara 0 Imbabura 2.
Feb 17: Dep Cuenca 1 Emelec 0; El Nacional 0 Imbabura 1; Olmedo 2 Macara 1.
Feb 18: LDU Quito 1 Dep Quito 1; Barcelona 2 Dep Azogues 2.
Feb 21: Emelec 1 Olmedo 1.
Feb 24: Dep Quito 2 El Nacional 2.
Feb 25: Emelec 4 LDU Quito 3; Dep Azogues 0 Olmedo 0; Macara 2 Dep Cuenca 1; Imbabura 1 Barcelona 2.
Mar 2: Barcelona 1 El Nacional 0; Dep Cuenca 3 Dep Azogues 1.
Mar 3: Olmedo 2 Imbabura 1; LDU Quito 2 Macara 1.
Mar 4: Dep Quito 2 Emelec 0.

ECUADOR – OPENING

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olmedo	5	3	2	0	7	3	11
LDU Quito	5	2	2	1	8	7	8
Dep Quito	5	2	2	1	7	6	8
Dep Cuenca	5	2	1	2	6	5	7
Imbabura	5	2	1	2	6	5	7
Barcelona	5	2	1	2	7	7	7
Dep Azogues	5	1	3	1	6	7	6
Macara	5	2	0	3	6	8	6
El Nacional	5	1	1	3	7	8	4
Emelec	5	1	1	3	7	11	4

PARAGUAY

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Feb 16: Sol de America 0 Libertad 2.
Feb 17: Tacuary 2 3 de Febrero 0; 12 de Octubre 1 2 de Mayo 1.
Feb 18: Olimpia 1 Nacional 1; Sportivo Trinidense 3 Guarani 2; Cerro Porteno 1 Sportivo Luqueno 0.
Feb 23: 2 de Mayo 0 Tacuary 1.
Feb 24: Nacional 2 Sportivo Luqueno 2; Libertad 2 Olimpia 2.
Feb 25: 3 de Febrero 1 Sol de America 0; Guarani 3 12 de Octubre 0; Sportivo Trinidense 0 Cerro Porteno 3.
Mar 2: Cerro Porteno 3 Nacional 1.
Mar 3: Sol de America 1 2 de Mayo 1; Tacuary 0 Guarani 0.
Mar 4: Olimpia 2 3 de Febrero 2; 12 de Octubre 1 Sportivo Trinidense 1.

PARAGUAY – OPENING

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cerro Porteno	3	3	0	0	7	1	9
Tacuary	3	2	1	0	3	0	7
Guarani	3	1	1	1	5	3	4
Libertad	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
3 de Febrero	3	1	1	1	3	4	4
Trinidense	3	1	1	1	4	6	4
Olimpia	3	0	3	0	5	5	3
2 de Mayo	3	0	2	1	2	3	2
Nacional	3	0	2	1	4	6	2
12 de Octubre	3	0	2	1	2	5	2
Luqueno	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
Sol de America	3	0	1	2	1	4	1

PERU

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Feb 10: Sporting Cristal 3 Dep Municipal 1; Sport Boys 0 Alianza Atletico 1; Universitario 0 Sport Ancash 0.
Feb 11: Melgar 2 Alianza Lima 1; Universidad SMP 1 Total Clean 0; Cienciano 3 Coronel Bolognesi 0.
Feb 14: Sport Boys 0 Sporting Cristal 1; Dep Municipal 2 Universitario 1; Alianza Lima 4 Universidad SMP 1; Coronel Bolognesi 0 Sport Ancash 0; Total Clean 0 Cienciano 2; Alianza Atletico 0 Melgar 0.
Feb 18: Sport Ancash 4 Total Clean 1; Melgar 1 Sport Boys 4; Cienciano 2 Dep Municipal 0; Universidad SMP 3 Alianza Atletico 0; Sporting Cristal 1 Alianza Lima 1; Universitario 4 Coronel Bolognesi 0.
Feb 24: Dep Municipal 1 Sport Ancash 1; Sporting Cristal 1 Melgar 3; Alianza Lima 2 Cienciano 1.
Feb 25: Sport Boys 2 Universidad SMP 0; Total Clean 3 Coronel Bolognesi 0; Alianza Atletico 3 Universitario 0.
Mar 3: Coronel Bolognesi 2 Dep Municipal 2; Universidad SMP 2 Sporting Cristal 2; Universitario 1 Alianza Lima 2.
Mar 4: Sport Ancash 1 Alianza Atletico 1; Cienciano 1 Sport Boys 1; Melgar 3 Total Clean 1.

PERU – OPENING

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cienciano	6	4	1	1	10	3	13
Melgar	6	4	1	1	11	8	13
Alianza Lima	6	3	2	1	12	8	11
Sporting Cristal	6	2	3	1	8	7	9
Alianza Atletico	6	2	3	1	5	4	9
Sport Boys	6	2	2	2	9	6	8
Univ SMP	6	2	2	2	8	9	8
Sport Ancash	6	1	4	1	6	4	7
Universitario	6	2	1	3	8	8	7
Dep Municipal	6	1	2	3	7	11	5
Total Clean	6	1	0	5	6	12	3
C Bolognesi	6	0	3	3	3	13	3

URUGUAY

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Feb 17: Rampla Juniors 1 Liverpool 2; Rentistas 1 River Plate 1; Nacional 0 Central Espanol 0.
Feb 18: Wanderers 1 Rocha 1; Defensor 2 Penarol 2; Bella Vista 0 Miramar Misiones 1; Progreso 1 Cerrito 1; Danubio 1 Tacuarembo 1.
Feb 24: Rampla Juniors 2 Defensor 2; Rocha 1 Rentistas 2; Danubio 3 Nacional 0.
Feb 25: Cerrito 1 Miramar Misiones 0; Progreso 2 Bella Vista 2; Wanderers 0 River Plate 1; Liverpool 1 Penarol 1; Tacuarembo 4 Central Espanol 0.
Mar 3: Central Espanol 0 Danubio 1; Bella Vista 2 Cerrito 0; Tacuarembo 3 Nacional 0.
Mar 4: Defensor 3 Liverpool 2; River Plate 3 Rocha 0; Miramar Misiones 2 Progreso 2; Penarol 2 Rampla Juniors 2.
Mar 6: Cerrito 3 Tacuarembo 3.
Mar 7: Rocha 1 Penarol 2; Danubio 0 Progreso 0; Rentistas 1 Liverpool 2; River Plate 2 Rampla Juniors 2; Wanderers 3 Defensor 4; Central Espanol 0 Miramar Misiones 2; Nacional 1 Bella Vista 1.

URUGUAY – CLOSING

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tacuarembo	4	2	2	0	11	4	8
River Plate	4	2	2	0	7	3	8
Danubio	4	2	2	0	5	1	8
Defensor	4	2	2	0	11	9	8
M Misiones	4	2	1	1	5	3	7
Liverpool	4	2	1	1	7	6	7
Penarol	4	1	3	0	7	6	6
Bella Vista	4	1	2	1	5	4	5
Cerrito	4	1	2	1	5	6	5
Progreso	4	0	4	0	5	5	4
Rentistas	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Rampla Jnrs	4	0	3	1	7	8	3
Nacional	4	0	2	2	1	7	2
Wanderers	3	0	1	2	4	6	1
Rocha	4	0	1	3	3	8	1
C Espanol	4	0	1	3	0	7	1

VENEZUELA

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Feb 11: Portuguesa 1 Caracas 3; Mineros Guayana 2 UA Maracaibo 1; Dep Tachira 1 Carabobo 1; Trujillanos 0 Monagas 1; Aragua 1 Zamora 0.
Feb 14: Dep Tachira 0 Monagas 0.
Feb 18: Carabobo 0 Caracas 0; Dep Tachira 2 Aragua 2; Zamora 0 Trujillanos 1; Monagas 1 Mineros Guayana 1.
Feb 25: Aragua 1 Carabobo 1; Caracas 1 UA Maracaibo 1; Portuguesa 5 Monagas 0; Mineros Guayana 1 Zamora 0; Trujillanos 3 Dep Tachira 1.
Mar 3: Caracas 1 Monagas 0.
Mar 4: Trujillanos 2 Aragua 1; Portuguesa 0 Zamora 4; Carabobo 1 UA Maracaibo 0; Mineros Guayana 1 Dep Tachira 1.

VENEZUELA – CLOSING

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Caracas	10	5	4	1	14	8	19
Zamora	10	5	2	3	14	7	17
Mineros G'ana	10	4	5	1	15	12	17
Trujillanos	10	4	3	3	15	11	15
UA Maracaibo	9	3	4	2	11	10	13
Carabobo	10	3	4	3	10	9	13
Aragua	10	2	5	3	10	13	11
Dep Tachira	10	1	6	3	9	14	9
Monagas	10	1	5	4	5	13	8
Portuguesa	9	2	0	7	12	18	6

CENTRAL & NORTH AMERICA

CONCACAF CHAMPIONS CUP

Quarter-finals

1st legs - Feb 13/21/22; 2nd legs - Feb 28/Mar 1
Olimpia (Hnd) v DC United (USA)
1-4, 2-3 (agg 3-7)
Pachuca (Mex) v Deportivo Marquense (Gtm)
2-0, 1-0 (agg 3-0)
Puntarenas (CR) v Houston Dynamo (USA)
1-0, 0-2 (agg 1-2)
W Connection (T&T) v Guadalajara (Mex)
2-1, 0-3 (agg 2-4)

MEXICO

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Feb 10: Cruz Azul 1 Guadalajara 2; Atlante 2 Monterrey 0; Tigres 1 San Luis 1; Veracruz 2 America 4; Pachuca 1 Necaxa 1; Atlas 2 Morelia 0; Jaguares 1 Tecos UAG 1.
Feb 11: Toluca 2 Pumas UNAM 2; Santos 0 Queretaro 0.
Feb 14: Tecos UAG 0 Toluca 0; America 4 Jaguares 1; Queretaro 0 Pachuca 0; San Luis 1 Atlas 0; Necaxa 0 Cruz Azul 2; Tigres 1 Atlante 0; Morelia 5 Veracruz 0; Pumas UNAM 2 Santos 1.
Feb 17: Pachuca 0 Pumas UNAM 0; Monterrey 2 Necaxa 2; Atlante 0 Guadalajara 3; Atlas 2 Tigres 0; Jaguares 2 Morelia 1; Toluca 2 America 2; Cruz Azul 0 Queretaro 0; Veracruz 2 San Luis 1.
Feb 18: Santos 1 Tecos UAG 1.
Feb 21: Guadalajara 1 Monterrey 1.
Feb 24: San Luis 1 Jaguares 0; Atlas 1 Atlante 1; Tigres 1 Veracruz 0; Queretaro 2 Monterrey 1; Morelia 2 Toluca 1; Necaxa 2 Guadalajara 4.
Feb 25: Tecos UAG 3 Pachuca 4; Pumas UNAM 0 Cruz Azul 1; America 2 Santos 0.
Mar 3: Cruz Azul 1 Tecos UAG 0; Jaguares 2 Tigres 3; Veracruz 0 Atlas 1; Monterrey 0 Pumas UNAM 1; Guadalajara 2 Queretaro 0; Atlante 3 Necaxa 0.
Mar 4: Pachuca 1 America 0; Toluca 1 San Luis 1; Santos 2 Morelia 1.

MEXICO – CLOSING – GROUP 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Guadalajara	8	5	2	1	16	8	17
Atlas	8	5	2	1	11	3	17
Cruz Azul	8	5	1	2	10	6	16
Necaxa	8	2	3	3	10	14	9
Queretaro	8	1	5	2	2	5	8
Jaguares	8	2	1	5	9	15	7

GROUP 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pachuca	8	4	3	1	13	7	15
San Luis	8	3	2	3	10	10	11
Atlante	8	3	1	4	8	11	10
Tecos UAG	8	2	3	3	11	12	9
Veracruz	8	2	1	5	6	16	7
Monterrey	8	1	2	5	6	14	5

GROUP 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tigres	8	4	2	2	8	7	14
America	8	4	1	3	16	9	13
Morelia	8	4	1	3	14	9	13
Pumas UNAM	8	3	3	2	6	6	12
Toluca	8	0	7	1	8	9	7
Santos	8	1	2	5	6	11	5

AFRICA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary round

1st legs - Jan 26/27/28/Feb 3; 2nd legs - Feb 10/11
Al Hilal (Sud) v Polisi (Zan)
4-0, 2-0 (agg 6-0)
Al Ittihad (Lby) v Mogas 90 (Ben)
3-0, 1-0 (agg 4-0)
AS Adema (Mad) v Anse Reunion (Sey)
0-0, 3-0 (agg 3-0)
Asante Kotoko (Gha) v Ports Authority (Gam)
1-0, 0-1 (agg 1-1; Ports Authority 4-2 on pens)
ASFA/Yennenga (BuF) v Nasarawa United (Nig)
1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3)
Canon Yaounde (Cam) v Etoile du Congo (Con)
1-0, 0-2 (agg 1-2)
Cotonsport (Cam) v Revenue Authority (Uga)
3-0, 0-0 (agg 3-0)
Diaraf (Sen) v Maranatha (Tog)
1-0, 0-3 (agg 1-3)
Esperance (Tun) v Renaissance (Chd)
4-0, 2-0 (agg 6-0)
Highlanders (Zim) v Pamplemousse (Mrs)
1-0, 0-1 (agg 1-1; Highlanders 9-8 on pens)
JS Kabylie (Alg) v Os Balantas (GuB)
3-1, 2-1 (agg 5-2)
Likhopo (Les) v Zanaco (Zam)
0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1)
M'lodi Sundowns (SAf) v Royal Leopards (Swa)
4-2, 2-0 (agg 6-2)
Ocean Boys (Nig) v Kallon (SLe)
0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1)
Petro Atletico (Ang) v Civics (Nam)
1-0, 1-1 (agg 2-1)
Primeiro Agosto (Ang) v Mangasport (Gab)
0-1, 1-1 (agg 1-2)
Renacimiento (EqG) v Ashanti Gold (Gha)
0-1, 0-1 (agg 0-2)
Sewe Sport (IvC) v Mighty Barolle (Lib)
3-1, 0-1 (agg 3-2)
St-Eloi Lupopo (DRC) v APR (Rwa)
1-2, 0-2 (agg 1-4)
**Stade Malien (Mli) v AS Douanes (Sen)
1-2, 0-2 (agg 1-4)
TP Mazembe (DRC) v Police XI (Bot)
3-0, 4-2 (agg 7-2)
USM Alger (Alg) v AS FNIS (Ngr)
3-1, 0-2 (agg 3-3; AS FNIS on away goals)
Wydad Casablanca (Mor) v ASC Mauritel (Mra)
4-0, 1-2 (agg 5-2)
*Young Africans (Tan) v AJSM (Com)
5-1
Zamalek (Egy) v Vital'O (Bdi)
4-1, 1-0 (agg 5-1)

Fello Star (Gui) v SC Praia (CVI)
– SC Praia did not show for 1st leg and were disqualified, Fello Star walkover;
Saint George (Eth) v Super Escom (Mwi)
– Super Escom withdrew, Saint George walkover;
Saint-Pierroise (Reu) v Grupo Desportivo (Moz)
– Saint-Pierroise withdrew, Grupo Desportivo walkover
**Young Africans v AJSM decided over one leg only, because AJSM's ground does not meet CAF competition standards*
***Tie awarded to Stade Malien because AS Douanes used an ineligible player*

Byes to 1st round:
Al Ahly (Egy; holders), ASEC Abidjan (IvC), Etoile Sahel (Tun), FAR Rabat (Mor)

1st round

1st legs - Mar 2/3/4/5
Al Hilal v Zamalek 2-0
Al Ittihad v AS FNIS 4-1
APR v Maranatha 2-0
AS Adema v TP Mazembe 2-2
Ashanti Gold v FAR Rabat 2-0
Esperance v Zanaco 2-0
Grupo Desportivo v Mamelodi Sundowns 1-1
Highlanders v Al Ahly 0-0
Kallon v ASEC Abidjan 0-1
Mangasport v JS Kabylie 3-1
Nasarawa United v Ports Authority 0-3
Saint George v Etoile du Congo 1-0
Sewe Sport v Cotonsport 1-0
Stade Malien v Wydad Casablanca 0-0
Young Africans v Petro Atletico 3-0

Still to play: Fello Star v Etoile Sahel

2nd legs - Mar 16/17/18

CONFEDERATION CUP

Preliminary round

1st legs - Jan 27/28; 2nd legs - Feb 9/10/11
Al Ahli (Lby) v AS Coton Chad (Chd)
2-1, 0-1 (agg 2-2; AS Coton Chad on away goals)
AS Togo-Port (Tog) v EGS Gafsa (Tun)
1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3)
ASAC Concorde (Mra) v ASO Chlef (Alg)
0-1, 1-2 (agg 1-3)
Curepipe Starlight (Mrs) v Ajesaia (Mad)
1-0, 0-4 (agg 1-4)
Delta Telestar (Gab) v OC Bukavu Dawa (DRC)
1-0, 0-2 (agg 1-2)
Dragons l'Oueme (Ben) v Kwara United (Nig)
0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3)
Hawks (Gam) v AS Denguele Sports (IvC)
0-0, 1-1 (agg 1-1; Hawks on away goals)
JS Talangai (Con) v Astres (Cam)
0-2, 0-1 (agg 0-3)
Mundu (Zan) v Mwana Africa (Zim)
0-3, 1-3 (agg 1-6)
Notwane (Bot) v Defence (Eth)
1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)
NPA Anchors (Lib) v US Goree (Sen)
2-3, 0-1 (agg 2-4)
Ports Authority (SLe) v AS Bamako (Mli)
2-0, 1-0 (agg 3-0)
Prince Louis (Bdi) v ATRACO (Rwa)
0-0, 0-3 (agg 0-3)
Sahel (Nig) v Etoile Filante (BuF)
2-2, 1-1 (agg 3-3; Etoile Filante on away goals)
Saint Michel United (Sey) v Saint-Pauloise (Reu)
2-1, 0-1 (agg 2-2; Saint-Pauloise on away goals)
San Pedro Claver (EqG) v Benfica Luanda (Alg)
1-5, 0-2 (agg 1-7)
*SC Bissau (GuB) v Satellite (Gui)
0-3
Textil de Pungue (Moz) v Simba (Tan)
1-1, 1-1 (agg 2-2; Textil de Pungue 3-1 on pens)

**SC Bissau withdrew after 1st leg, Satellite walkover*

Byes to 1st round:
Al Merreikh (Sud), CS Sfaxien (Tun), DC Motema Pembe (DRC), Dolphin (Nig), ENPPI (Egy), Green Buffaloes (Zam), HUS Agadir (Mor), InterClube (Ang), Ismaili (Egy), Issia Wazi (IvC), MC Alger (Alg), Tema Youth (Gha), Union Douala (Cam), US Ouakam (Sen)

1st round

1st legs - Mar 2/3/4/5
Ajesaia v Ismaili 2-2
AS Coton Chad v Al Merreikh 2-0
ASO Chlef v ENPPI 0-0
Benfica Luanda v DC Motema Pembe 4-1
Defence v ATRACO 1-0
Etoile Filante v US Ouakam 1-0
Hawks v Dolphin 0-0
Kwara United v MC Alger 3-0
Mwana Africa v InterClube 2-0
OC Bukavu Dawa v Issia Wazi 0-2
Ports Authority v EGS Gafsa 3-2
Saint-Pauloise v Green Buffaloes 0-0
Textil de Pungue v Union Douala 0-3
US Goree v HUS Agadir 0-0

Still to play: Satellite v CS Sfaxien

Astres v Tema Youth
– Tema Youth did not show for 1st leg; Astres walkover

2nd legs - Mar 16/17/18

ASIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

Mar 7: Al Arabi (Kuw) 0 Al Zawra'a (Irq) 1; Al Rayyan (Qat) 0 Al Wahda (UAE) 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Wahda	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Al Zawra'a	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Al Arabi	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Al Rayyan	1	0	0	1	0	1	0

Group B

Mar 7: Al Hilal (Sau) 1 Al Kuwait (Kuw) 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Hilal	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Al Kuwait	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Pakhtakor (Uzb)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Esteghlal (Irn) excluded for failing to submit player list in time

Group C

Mar 7: Al Karama (Syr) 2 Al Sadd (Qat) 1; Al Najaf (Irq) 0 Neftchi (Uzb) 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Karama	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Neftchi	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Al Sadd	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Al Najaf	1	0	0	1	0	1	0

Group D

Mar 7: Al Ain (UAE) 0 Al Shabab (Sau) 2; Sepahan (Irn) 2 Al Ittihad (Syr) 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Shabab	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Sepahan	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Al Ittihad	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Al Ain	1	0	0	1	0	2	0

Group E

Mar 7: Shanghai Shenhua (Chn) 1 Sydney FC (Aus) 2; Urawa Reds (Jap) 3 Persik Kediri (Ins) 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Urawa Reds	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
Sydney FC	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Shanghai	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Persik Kediri	1	0	0	1	0	3	0

Group F

Mar 7: Arema Malang (Ins) 1 Kawasaki Frontale (Jap) 3; Bangkok University (Tha) 0 Chunnam Dragons (SKo) 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kawasaki	1	1	0	0	3	1	3
Bangkok Univ	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Chunnam	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Arema Malang	1	0	0	1	1	3	0

Group G

Mar 7: Adelaide United (Aus) 0 Shandong Luneng (Chn) 1; Songnam Ilhwa (SKo) 4 Dong Tam Long An (Vie) 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Songnam	1	1	0	0	4	1	3
Shandong	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Adelaide	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Dong Tam	1	0	0	1	1	4	0

Group winners qualify for quarter-finals.
Bye to quarter-finals: Chonbuk Motors (SKo; holders)

AUSTRALIA

Championship play-offs

Minor semi-final
1st leg - Jan 26; 2nd leg - Feb 2
Syd

#1: The Finisher

Who's the best hitman in world football? We asked the experts

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger on Thierry Henry

● INTELLIGENCE
"He is an intelligent guy and every year he learns something new. He gathers knowledge every day and remembers this for the next time he finds himself in a similar situation."

● FITNESS
"Sometimes when I give him a rest, he doesn't feel comfortable. He wants to be involved all the time."

● CHARACTER
"He has come back from some big disappointments. After Euro 2004 he was very much of the mindset that maybe he should stop playing for France. Well, he showed dedication and passion to bounce back and play in the World Cup Final."

● SPEED
"Thierry has shown that if you have the speed then everything else is possible. With the pace and potential he has, I just felt it was possible to make him into something different when we signed him from Juventus."

● TECHNIQUE
"He has great control of the ball. He will go down in history at the same level as Diego Maradona and Pele."

NEXT MONTH:
The free-kick expert

THE VOTES

3... Henry
2... Crespo, Drogba, Eto'o, Ronaldo
1... Inzaghi, Klose, Larsson, Morientes, Pauleta, Trezeguet, Van Nistelrooy

IKER CASILLAS
(REAL MADRID)
"Samuel Eto'o [Barcelona] is a devil in the box. You never know what he's going to do."

CESC FABREGAS
(ARSENAL)
"Thierry Henry [Arsenal] has been number one for some time. He makes it difficult for whoever he plays against."

RICARDO CARVALHO
(CHELSEA)
"Didier Drogba [Chelsea] is a scorer through and through. He has force and is capable of overcoming any defence."

XABI ALONSO
(LIVERPOOL)
"Fernando Morientes [Valencia] has all the qualities. He is lethal with his head."

ERIC ABIDAL
(LYON)
"Thierry Henry makes it all look ridiculously easy."

GABRIEL HEINZE
(MANCHESTER UNITED)
"Hernan Crespo [Internazionale] has scored goals everywhere he's played."

XAVI
(BARCELONA)
"Samuel Eto'o has the killer instinct. He'll get hold of any loose ball and punish defences."

FREDERIC KANOUTE
(SEVILLA)
"Didier Drogba is athletic, fast, good in the air and is always in good shape."

MIKEL ARTETA
(EVERTON)
"Ruud Van Nistelrooy [Real Madrid] is the archetypal battering ram and has a great scoring knack."

GAEL GIVET
(MONACO)
"David Trezeguet [Juventus] is the most clinical finisher I've ever seen."

ZLATAN IBRAHIMOVIC
(INTERNAZIONALE)
"Ronaldo [Milan] is still a brilliant package of pace, muscle and precision shooting."

PAULETA
(PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN)
"I love that short burst that takes Ronaldo past defenders. He scores goals like breathing."

LILIAN LASLANDES
(NICE)
"Pauleta is a born goalscorer with impeccable instincts. He's been doing it year after year."

PETRI PASANEN
(WERDER BREMEN)
"Filippo Inzaghi [Milan] is a nuisance from start to finish. He's cunning and goal-hungry."

KIM KALLSTROM
(LYON)
"No one's better at slipping his marker and finding the right finish than Henrik Larsson [Man Utd/Helsingborgs]."

CHRISTOPH METZELDER
(BORUSSIA DORTMUND)
"Miroslav Klose [Werder Bremen] is very clever in his off-the-ball runs and also fantastic in the air."

CLAUDIO PIZARRO
(BAYERN MUNICH)
"Hernan Crespo is the identikit poacher. He waits for defenders to switch off for a split-second and then comes alive."

LUCIO
(BAYERN MUNICH)
"With his speed, magical skill and ability to improvise, Thierry Henry is deadly."

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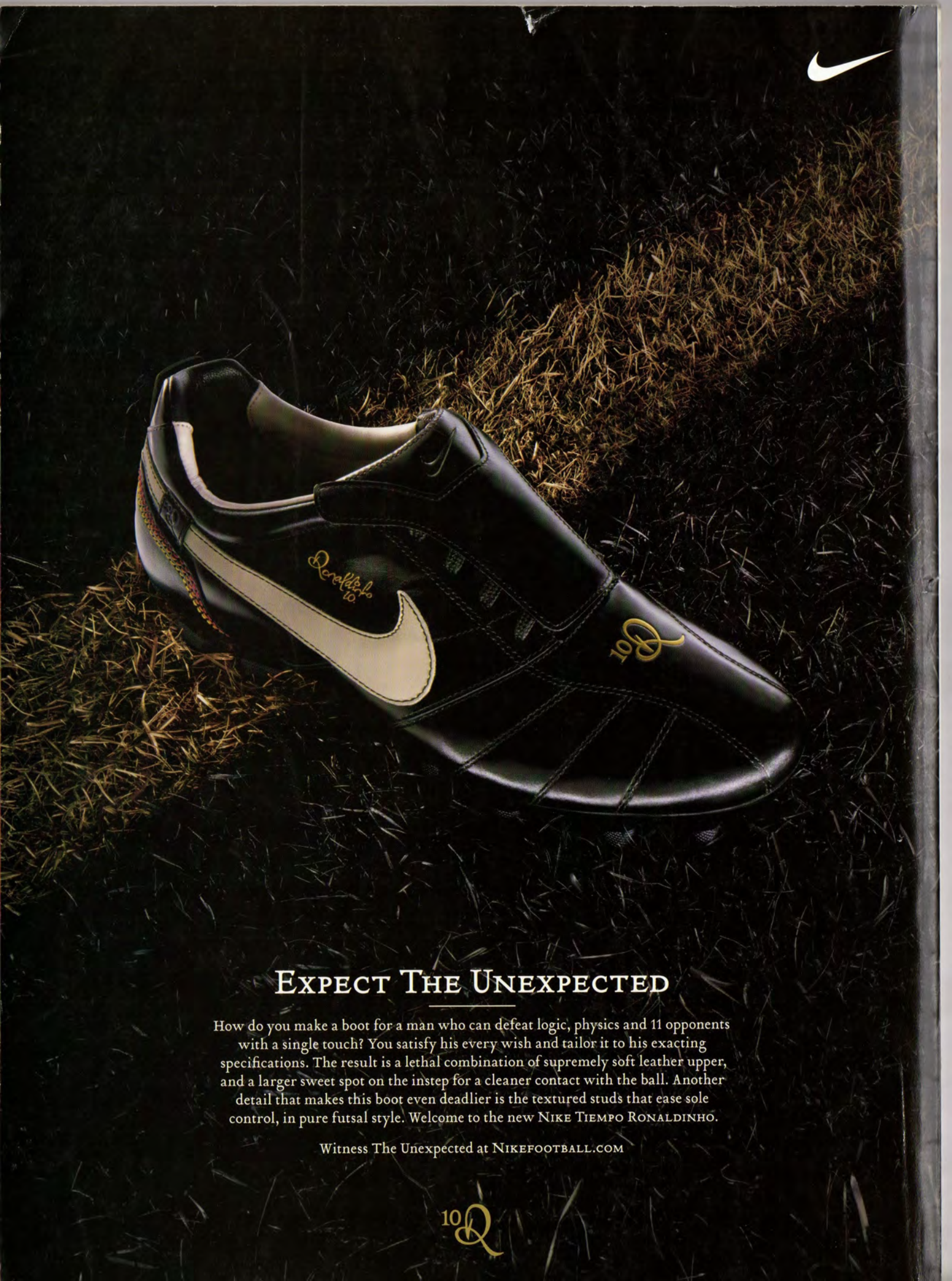
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